

Elephant-based Volunteer Tourism: An exploration of participant experiences and
reflections on captive elephant welfare in Thailand

by

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AUTHORS DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

Due to the diverse forms of interaction between humans and animals, particularly in tourism settings, it is no surprise that there has been growing scholarship evaluating its intersection (Cohen, 2009; Fennell, 2012 a,b,c, 2013, 2014, 2015). In recent decades, social science researchers have begun to take up these intersections via tourist experiences encountering wildlife (Markwell, 2015) with a critical subtheme of captive animals as visitor attractions. Informed by eco-feminist philosophy, a case study of elephant-based voluntourism in Thailand is the focus in this scholarship. The purpose of this qualitative research was to understand volunteer tourist perspectives of captive elephant tourism in Thailand. Objectives of this research were to interpret stories and meanings of elephant welfare held by volunteer tourists and assess the potential of volunteer tourism to aid in the improvement of captive elephant welfare. Stories were weaved using tenets of narrative analysis (Glover, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1995) oriented through an eco-feminist lens. Interview data revealed that the process of engagement in elephant welfare and volunteering has resulted in participants feeling a moral responsibility to continue forms of advocacy. The data provides context from which to analyze and think critically about care and welfare and how these pieces may interact to influence the operative nature of tourism enterprises and the wellbeing of captive elephants.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	2
1.0 Subjectivity Statement	2
1.1 Social Contexts	3
1.2 Scholarly Contexts	7
1.2.1 Human-animal intersections in tourism research.....	8
1.2.2 Animal Ethics and Welfare	10
1.2.3 Voluntourism	10
1.3 Purpose, Objectives, Research Questions and Significance.....	11
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY.....	14
2.1 Human and Non-human Animal Relationships in Tourism.....	14
2.1.1 Elephant-based tourism in Thailand	18
2.2 Animal Welfare	23
2.3 Volunteer tourism	26
2.3.1 Elephant-based volunteer tourism.....	29
2.4 Eco-feminism and Feminist Care Theory.....	31
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY.....	35
3.0 Methodology	35
3.1 Methods.....	37
3.1.1 Research Ethics	37
3.1.2 Data Collection	37
3.1.3 Data Analysis and Representation	41
3.1.3.1 Analysis Process.....	43
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH OUTCOMES	47
4.1 Antecedents to Welfare Advocacy	47
4.1.1 Witnessing abuse on captive elephants	48
4.1.2 Emergence of ethical questioning.....	50
4.1.3 Fostering connection	54
4.2 What is welfare?	58
4.2.1 Mahout welfare	60
4.3 Exploring Volunteer Tourism Potential.....	66
4.3.1 Ignorance and deception in elephant tourism	66
4.3.2 Opportunities to cultivate advocacy through volunteer tourism.....	74
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	80
5.1 Value development and variation in volunteer perspectives.....	80
5.2 Growing advocacy and the possibilities of volunteer tourism	83
5.3 Explorations using an eco-feminist theoretical lens.....	85
5.4 Addressing gaps in the literature	88
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION	92
6.1 Key Contributions.....	94
6.2 Limitations	95
6.3 Implications for Future Research.....	96

REFERENCES.....	97
APPENDIX A.....	112
APPENDIX B.....	113

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE ONE: Colour Coding and Research Question Numbering.....	42
FIGURE TWO: Summary Document.....	43
FIGURE THREE: Key Take Away.....	44
FIGURE FOUR: Emerging Themes Document.....	45

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE ONE: Participant Profiles.....	37
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PREFACE

While there are a variety of terms used to describe non-wild elephants, I use the term captive (rather than domesticated) as there is no difference genetically or behaviorally from their wild counterparts (Lair, 1997). In fact, the term domesticated is not only erroneous; it is also a common misconception that can obstruct conservation work, and efforts to ensure better welfare of captive animals. If these animals are described as domesticated rather than wild or captive, visitors are more likely to accept poor welfare management practices such as chaining, confinement and close contact with humans (World Animal Protection, 2017).

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Subjectivity Statement

In December of 2014, I embarked on a backpacking trip to Thailand. Growing up an avid animal enthusiast, I knew to conduct research prior to departure and searched how to ethically interact with elephants abroad. From my preliminary investigation I found a sanctuary for retired elephants- many of whom have been abused and tortured at the hands of the tourism industry. No amount of research could have prepared me for what I witnessed at this sanctuary and in Thailand more broadly. I gazed upon elephants whose souls have left their bodies through the process of spirit breaking, learned of their unique life histories and how they came to finally retire from the industry. While traveling throughout the country I saw elephants chained to the sides of busy streets, swaying with stress as their handlers sought tourist attention.

I returned to Thailand in November of 2016 and spent an additional seven weeks traveling and exploring the country. I volunteered at Phuket Elephant Sanctuary where I met Baan Yen, a fifty year old elephant that had recently been retired to the sanctuary after a life of serving tourists. The deep hurt she felt was palpable, as she would regularly become still, hang her head and lay her trunk on the ground as if remembering all she had been through. Baan Yen tragically passed away two months after I met her. I have read countless journal articles and media posts about elephant tourism and traveled the country extensively but it was not until I looked into the eyes of Baan Yen that I truly understood. In a very real way, Baan Yen served as a catalyst for my own comprehension of elephant sentience and welfare. Based on my personal experiences, I am compelled to

seek alternatives to the current state of elephant tourism in Thailand. To this project I bring forth a deep-rooted passion for wildlife and as such feel it necessary to be transparent with my journey to conducting this study.

1.1 Social Contexts

Non-human animals are inextricably linked to humans in boundless ways. From entertainment and food, to experimentation and research, non-human animals are used as resources or commodities to fulfill human interest (Wearing and Jobberns, 2011). Today, countless tourism-related operations across the globe make use of non-human animals for sustenance, transportation, interest, education and amusement of their guests (Fennell and Sheppard, 2011) and Thailand is an exemplary illustration of this phenomenon. Thailand is the second most popular tourist destination in Asia (UNWTO, 2016). As the national symbol and royal emblem of Thailand, Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) are infused into the fabric of Thai culture (Cohen, 2009). The diversity and abundance of encounters available has created a mecca for wildlife tourists, cultural tourists, adventure tourists and volunteer tourists seeking intimate and interactive experiences with elephants. Currently, elephant engagement opportunities are offered on a spectrum ranging from professional circuses and impromptu performances to jungle trekking camps and sanctuaries. In 2010, World Animal Protection (WAP) revealed that of the 118 wildlife tourism venues in Thailand, captive elephants were kept at 106 of them making elephants the most highly represented species in tourist activities (World Animal Protection, 2010).

The Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) is an iconic symbol of Asian culture found

throughout the Indian sub-continent (Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Bhutan), South East Asian countries (China, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar and Malaysia) as well as on Asian islands (Burma, Borneo and Indonesia) (Laohachaiboon, 2010). The population of wild elephants in Thailand was estimated to be between 2500-3200 and recent data suggests that the captive population is at 4,435 individuals with nearly every captive elephant currently employed by the tourism industry (World Animal Protection, 2017; Kontogeorgopolous, 2009; Laohachaiboon, 2010). Between the 1840s-1970s, there was great insurgence of wild capture of elephants for human use including transportation, logging, and tools in military campaigns (Kontogeorgopolous, 2009; Suter et al., 2013). These human-benefitting exploits are mirrored in the governing bodies currently responsible for their management: The Department of Livestock, The Department of Transportation and Forestry Industry Organization (Duffy and Moore, 2011). Despite the fact that captive and wild elephants do not differ in genetics or behaviour, the laws governing their use differ immensely. Wild elephants are governed under the Wildlife Reservation and Protection Act of 1992 (and up to 18 other protective Acts) whereas captive elephants fall only under the Draught Animal Act of 1939 whereby they are managed as private property with little to no provision of their welfare or use (Laohachaiboon, 2010; Lair, 1997).

The involvement of elephants in tourism was sparked by their removal from the logging industry in 1989 (Kontogeorgopolous, 2009; Suter et al., 2013). The emergency declaration of the logging ban (as a result of logging-induced localized floods) rendered *Mahouts* (Thai term for trainers and caregivers) and their elephants unemployed overnight (Laohachaiboon, 2010). As such, many Mahouts with their elephants sought to

exploit the growing tourism industry while others remained illegally participating in logging (Duffy and Moore, 2010; Kontogeorgopolous, 2009; Suter et al., 2013). The number of captive individuals has increased 50% since 1991, which is more than double the estimated number of remaining elephants left over from the logging ban (Pintavongs, Chueplaiveij, Boonyasart, Kidyhoo, Pravai, Rattanakunuprakam et. al, 2014). While an increased number of captive individuals may seem a success to tourism stakeholders there are real implications for welfare, competition for limited resources and indications of profit-oriented breeding to meet tourist demand (World Animal Protection, 2017).

International Non-Government Organization's (INGOs) are advocating animal welfare in the industry as abuse, neglect and torture are directly infused into the 'training' (*Phjaan* in Thai) and employment of captive elephants. The *Phjaan* is a process of "spirit-crushing" whereby elephants are captured from the wild and separated from their mothers at a young age (typically 3-4 years old) and are constrained, sleep and food deprived, beaten, stabbed, burned, and tortured into submission (Bone and Bone, 2015; Duffy and Moore, 2010; Kontogeoropolous, 2009). It is when the young elephant ceases to fight back that the process is deemed complete. In other words, the body of the elephant is transformed into a vessel, or tool, that may be used to serve human interest. Broadly speaking, elephant training can be situated within the sphere of masculinity and represents the elephant as an animal requiring advanced willpower and at times violent forms of discipline in order to render it suitable for coexistence with humans (Sadashige, 2015). This complicated relationship is reflective of traditional masculine value systems in that there is a dominant/subservient dualism present where the masculine human

oppresses the subservient 'other' (women/nature), in this case elephants (Plumwood, 1993).

Due to the substantial cognitive ability of Asian elephants, they are highly intelligent and as such are known to express emotions such as grief and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Sukumar, 2006; Bradshaw and Linder 2009; Bradshaw, Schore, Brown, Poole and Moss, 2005; Rizzolo and Bradshaw; 2016). In fact, according to a recent study by Rizzolo and Bradshaw (2016) 74% of examined captive elephants showed symptoms of PTSD. These symptoms include, but are not limited to, stereotypic behaviours, self-mutilation, severe anxiety, infanticide and inter and intra species violence (Rizzolo and Bradshaw, 2016). Unfortunately, this form of dominance and manipulation is revered and considered an indispensable process of 'domestication' in traditional Asian culture (Laohachaiboon, 2010). While in recent years there has been some push-back on the use of this technique by elephant owners claiming to use positive reinforcement methods, "relying on an elephant's cooperative will to ensure the safety of handlers and visitors during stressful, demanding situations, such as rides or shows, or any other situation leaving people unprotected is a serious risk to human safety" (World Animal Report, 2017; p. 15). In other words, simply using a reward-based system built by mutual trust may be unpredictable due to the immense and unnatural stress associated with many tourist-based tasks common in the industry, which puts handlers and the public at risk. The elephant tourism industry is already dangerous with 17 fatalities and 21 seriously injured reported by media between 2010-2016. It should be noted that when fatalities and injuries do not involve a foreign tourist, they tend to not be covered in mainstream media (World Animal Protection, 2017) so the numbers are likely much higher. Since World

Animal Protection's report in 2010, there has been a 30% increase in the number of elephants at tourism ventures in Thailand with 357 more elephants in Thailand found to be living with poor welfare conditions (World Animal Protection, 2017). This phenomenon is a result of more visitors to Thailand in combination with an ever expanding and developing elephant tourism industry.

Listed as an endangered species by the Convention on the International Trades of Endangered Species (CITES, 2015), Asian elephants (particularly captive individuals) are sparsely protected domestically and the tourism industry is putting pressure on the working elephant through long working hours, inhibiting natural behaviour and physical acts of abuse. The immergence of volunteer tourism is challenging the fast-paced, consumptive and arguably reckless nature of the industry and may play an essential role in altering the use of elephants in tourism and beyond. Volunteer tourism can provide alternative economic revenue, increase conservation awareness through information sharing, contribute to a shift towards more ethical operations where welfare is a top priority all while alleviating stress and abuse on individual elephants. My research builds on literature in the areas of tourism and animal welfare, volunteer tourism, eco-feminism and ethics of care.

1.2 Scholarly Contexts

Tourism researchers have become more attentive to the issue of animal welfare including the welfare of elephants in Thailand and other countries. While a substantial body of research exists on wildlife tourism (Ballantyne, Packer and Faulk, 2011; Ballantyne, Packer and Hughes, 2009) the current growing interest in the study of human-animal

relationships in tourism (Markwell, 2015), and animal ethics and welfare more specifically (Fennell, 2011; 2013; 2014), provides important scholarly context for this research. The broad and growing subfield of volunteer tourism with explorations on ethical consumption (Weeden and Boluk, 2014) is equally relevant.

1.2.1 Human-animal intersections in tourism research

Introduced using a model for tourism-animal relationships (Markwell, 2015: p. 7), Markwell unpacks media representation of animals and how that contributes to our desire to see them in person. He describes the representation of animals in media (i.e. television and film) to be “smeared with an anthropomorphic gel” which illuminates the tendencies of media outlets to apply humanness to animals. Indeed, animals continue to be similarly marketed by tour companies to possess anthropomorphic qualities such as strength, power, ferocity, exoticism and joy (Markwell, 2015) and can act as motivators for tourists to witness their spectacle. This is particularly evident in the vast diversity of elephant tourism exploits in Thailand that capitalize on human-like activities including bicycle riding, picture painting, musical instrument playing, various sport displays and circus-like performances (World Animal Protection, 2010).

While the activities listed above may seem troublesome, the reality is there is a similar range in tourist willingness to support such ventures. Using an example of a known Thai tourism operator where animal abuse is rampant, Bone and Bone (2015) unpack online visitor reactions to elephants engaging in a dart-throwing trick. They concluded that many tourists see elephant shows as an acceptable part of their Thailand experience while others express moral outrage and emotional upset. As Fennell (2013) and Bone and

Bone (2015) argue, tourists seem to disengage from morality and ethical considerations that may be considered 'wrong' or 'unjust' in favour of the exotic experience. In doing so, Bone and Bone (2015) claim that the "setting aside of moral considerations seems to permeate the tourist experience in Thailand and helps to support what happens to the body of the Other" (p. 68). A prominent aim of this study is to challenge these dominant discourses within the elephant tourism industry.

Due to the diverse forms of interactions between humans and animals, particularly in tourism settings, it is no surprise that there has been growing scholarship evaluating its intersection (Cohen, 2009; Markwell, 2015). In recent decades, social science researchers have begun to take up these intersections via experiences of tourists encountering wildlife (Markwell, 2015) with a critical subtheme of captive animals as visitor attractions. It has been presented that engagement in wildlife tourism has been effective in positively contributing to increased awareness and commitment in conservation-minded action (Ballantyne et al., 2011; Rattan et al., 2012). Ballantyne et al. (2009) found that wildlife tourism management practices that recruit tourists as conservation partners, communicate the reasons behind imposed constraints, and present a constant message regarding interactions with wildlife, are likely to be most successful in meeting the needs of both tourists and wildlife. In Thailand, this tactic is generally exemplified in sanctuaries with volunteer tourism programming.

1.2.2 Animal Ethics and Welfare

The bulk of literature available directly considering the use of animals in tourism is limited. However, tourism scholar David Fennell is at the forefront of this contemporary issue with various publications concerning animal ethics (2011; 2012c; 2014; 2015), animal welfare (2013) and animal rights (2012) in tourism settings. Through his work, it is exemplified that despite the sheer volume of animals used in the industry, concern over their welfare is severely lacking in both theory and practice (Fennell, 2013).

Fennell (2013) speaks to the importance of sentience, pain and suffering as necessary elements in the evaluating and understanding of animal welfare. Sentience can be understood as the ability to perceive external stimuli (Fennell, 2013). There is recognition that animals show awareness of their surroundings; are aware of emotions that relate to sensations they feel or experience and are self-aware in that they are mindful of what is happening to them and what they are experiencing (pain, pleasure, hunger, heat, cold etc.) (FAO, 2009). Additionally, they are cognizant of their relations to other animals including humans (FAO, 2009; Fennell, 2013). In the data collection phase of this research, these tenets served as guideposts from which to unpack volunteer tourist understandings of elephant welfare.

1.2.3 Voluntourism

Volunteer tourism is most often defined as being catered to “tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain

environments or research into aspects of society and environment” (Wearing, 2001: p. 1). “Voluntourism”, as it is often referred, is growing in popularity and availability to the everyday tourist (Sin, 2009). “Alternative” tourisms, (be that volunteer, pro-poor, green, eco, justice or other) have been enthusiastically marketed as overly positive with promise of constructive impacts however, there are also fair and poignant criticisms that point to it as a repackaging of modern mass tourism (Sin and Minka, 2014).

Volunteer tourism has been said to provide an opportunity for engagement in political activism and the expansion of “activist identities” (McGeehee and Santos, 2005 in Boluk and Ranjabar, 2014; p 138). Consumers, or volunteer tourists, may express, construct (Varul, 2009) and/or create their desired identity through their buying power (Barnet et al., 2005 in Boluk and Ranjabar, 2014). For example, ethical consumers are similarly marketing themselves as ethical through their consumptive choices (Varul, 2009). In doing so, they can be viewed as expressing their morals and values through their engagement in particular causes. When volunteer tourists choose to engage with ethical operators where welfare is prioritized it can translate to their prescribed interests and values. This tendency provides basis from which to view volunteer tourism as a potential tool to challenge the current archetype dominating the elephant tourism industry.

1.3 Purpose, Objectives, Research Questions and Significance

The purpose of this qualitative research was to understand volunteer tourist perspectives of captive elephant tourism in Thailand. Objectives of this research were to interpret stories and meanings of elephant welfare held by volunteer tourists and assess the potential of volunteer tourism to aid in the improvement of captive elephant welfare.

Theoretically, the study is informed by tenets of eco-feminism. Following Donovan and Adams (2007), eco-feminists maintain the platform that “there are important connections- historical, experiential, symbolic, and theoretical- between the domination of woman and the domination of nature” (p. 87). While there is a growing literature on tourism and animals few studies have considered eco-feminist tenets of care, compassion, intersectionality as connectors to non-human animal ‘others’. My research uses eco-feminism to center these tenets within the investigation of elephant welfare.

To achieve these objectives four research questions guided the investigation:

1. What meanings and perceptions of captive elephant welfare do volunteer tourists’ hold?
2. What challenges and opportunities do volunteer tourists perceive in relation to enhancing elephant welfare through tourism?
3. How, if at all, do tenets of care, compassion and connection to nature manifest in volunteer tourists’ motivations for, experiences of, and reflections on participating in a volunteer placement with captive elephants?
4. How do volunteer tourists perceive the outcome (impact) of their volunteer experiences on captive elephant welfare?

By considering such a topic, this study helped to contextualize the importance of the consideration of animal welfare in tourism research and practice. Additionally, this thesis advanced tourism research through the use of eco-feminist philosophy as a guidepost from which to reject the objectification and abuse of animals for human entertainment in tourism settings. Qualitative inquiry provides the unique opportunity to

allow participants to share their perspectives and reflect on and criticize the social world. In exercising this approach, this research granted the participants an open forum to share their stories and perspectives in an un-bound and free-formed way. Eco-feminism speaks to the importance of the individual, contextual and historical details of a case from which this methodology grants.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

This study is situated within, and informed by, tourism literatures dealing with human-animal relationships, animal welfare and volunteer tourism. The following review begins with an overview of research on human-animal paradigmatic analyses with specific background into contemporary research on elephant tourism in Thailand and beyond. Next, animal welfare is defined and a gap in the literature is established pertaining to animal welfare intersections with tourism research.

2.1 Human and Non-human Animal Relationships in Tourism

Contact between human beings and animals take place in four main areas: as pets, animals in agriculture, animals in science and education, and animals in the wild (Bowd, 1984). However, only in the past few decades has research been directed towards understanding the development and structures of attitudes relating to the treatment of animals in western society (Pizam, 2008). Yet, “they intersect daily lives as food, pets, amusement, wildlife, neighbours, helpers, nuisance, etc.; and thus constitute a pivotal part of socialities and political economies” (Hobson, 2007; p. 257).

In spite of the primary role animals play in countless tourism experiences (including food, transport or entertainment) rarely have ethical considerations been evaluated within tourism literature (Hall and Brown, 1996; Hughes, 2001; Pizam, 2008; Fennell, 2015). Instead, we have found the question of animal-human interactions and relationships unpacked in social sciences and humanities literature (Hobson, 2007). Of these publications, we see complex and diverse concentrations from preservation of biodiversity and animal welfare (Murdoch, 2003), to challenging the anthropocentric

ontological divide between culture and nature (Plumwood, 1993). More recently, in an edited book by Kevin Markwell (2015) animal intersections with tourism settings are unpacked in three parts: (1) ethics and animal welfare, (2) conflict, contradiction and contestation and (3) shifting relationships. In this scholarship, human-animal relationships in tourism settings are explored through papers on animal objectification (Burns, 2015), exploitation (Bone & Bone, 2015), eco-tourism and animal rights (Wearing and Jobberns, 2015), trophy-hunting (Lovelock, 2015), and consumption (Mkono, 2015) among numerous other unique intersections. Markwell (2015a) showcases the diverse number of ways humans and animals intersect in tourism spaces, places, practices and structures.

The structure of Markwell's (2015) book first introduces ethics and welfare using case studies that exemplify the concerns regarding the moral and ethical treatment of animals (Fennell, 2015) and how animals are objectified and commodified by an industry that solely considers their instrumental value (Burns, 2015). Through this chapter the authors speak to the tendency of tourism to diminish the interests and agency of animals as subjects, rather than objects. In other words, the tourism industry can present animals as objects of the tourist gaze rather than purposeful agents in their own right. Wearing and Jobberns (2015) advocate for a new form of ecotourism that considers welfare of animals on their intrinsic- rather than instrumental- value.

The following section shrewdly demonstrates the varied ways ethical and welfare considerations are conflicted in the tourism industry. Here, the inconsistencies, ambiguities and contradictions present in human-animal relationships are illuminated. For example, Higham and Neves (2015) argue that ecotourism is actually a form of neoliberal

capitalism where environmental and social issues are not fixed but reproduced through its execution. In another example, Wearing and Jobberns (2015) highlight the contradiction evident in ecotourism ventures that heavily rely on the petroleum industry (i.e. whale watching). Further, Cohen (2015) presents the example of elephant tourism as a paradox in that highly abuse-disciplining practices serve to deliver compliant animals performing tricks for an amused audience. Here, the author contends that two aspects of these elephant shows serve to maintain them: that tourists themselves are unaware of the cruelty and that anthropomorphic discourses maintain the ruse that elephants are enjoying the performance work. Markwell (2015b) argues, "The expectations held by tourists of the nature of those encounters can seriously compromise the interests of animals, something that is not often understood by tourists that are only given access to the 'front stage' performance" (p. 298). The final portion of the compilation by Markwell (2015b) highlights the substantial shifts in human-animal relationships that have occurred using case studies on social value reconstruction of marine turtles, charismatic megafauna as flagship species for conservation and pet involvement in travel (Gretzel and Hardy, 2015). This edited assembly of scholarship on human and animal intersections demonstrates the complexities in contemporary critical tourism studies and likewise provides context from which to think critically about our intersections with animals as tourism scholars and practitioners.

Introduced in Kontogeorgopolous (2009), wildlife-human interactions can be categorized into four paradigmatic views in tourism: (1) *the dominionistic view* which sees animals under the dominion of humans with an emphasis on control and manipulation (Kellert, 1996; Orams, 2002; Kontogeorgopolous 2009), (2) *the utilitarian view* whereby

animals are valued by their ability to socially, economically and psychologically benefit humans, (3) *the moralistic view* which infuses animal welfare with animal rights and understanding the anthropocentric nature of animal tourism, and lastly, (4) *the protectionistic view* which sees the value in the utilization of animals in tourism as ambassadors for protection and conservation of species through economic gain (Hughes, 2001; Kontogeorgopolous, 2009). Currently, the worldviews of dominionistic and utilitarian prevail as evidenced through the vast anthropocentric, exploitative uses for non-human animals in the tourism industry (see Hartman, 2010; Drake, 2011; Duffy and Moore, 2011). Bertella (2014) notes that in response there are three dominant animal ethics perspectives: the utilitarian approach (sentience), the animal rights approach (intrinsic value) and the ecofeminist approach (relational and emotional capabilities). Ethical considerations on the use of non-human animals in tourism have prompted an insurgence of research into animal ethics (Fennell, 2012 a, b, c; Shani and Pizam, 2008), which includes welfare (Fennell, 2013), moral responsibility and perceived values of our non-human counterparts.

In the context of tourism, animals play an important role in the pleasure that tourists derive from zoos, aquaria, dog sledding, hunting, fishing, ecotourism, circuses, and so on (Fennell, 2015). The common denominator to all of these activities is that animals are related as objects rather than subjects – the animals are more often manipulated than recognized as purposive agents or actors in their own right (Hughes, 2001; Bertella, 2014). For example, a study conducted by Sheppard and Fennell (2011) unpacked a Canadian case of dog culling in a dog sledding operation where the number of dogs exceeded demand and therefore were determined to be useless. In this study, the authors warn of

the severe consequences of the conceptualization of animals as commodities and the negative implications in terms of ethics and also destination image (cited by Bertella, 2014). In Fennell's (2014) words, tourism fails to associate animal use with ecological insensitivity because we are "more concerned about *what* we are disturbing in the environment rather than *who*" (p.988) (Yudina and Grimwood, 2015). As such, tourism scholars have begun to challenge this predisposition through the exploration of co-creation where both human and animal are seen as actors in the tourist experience (Bertella, 2014).

2.1.1 Elephant-based tourism in Thailand

Tourism in Thailand has been steadily increasing and has almost doubled in visitors from 2010 (15.9 million) to 2016 (32.6 million) (World Animal Protection, 2017). In 2014 it was reported that in a survey of 1700 tourists to Thailand, 36% interviewed had completed or planned to partake in an elephant ride. This translates to 8.9 million travelers having potentially sought out elephant rides in 2014 alone (World Animal Protection, 2017). This number has increased in 2016 to 40% of surveyed tourists visiting Thailand and 12.8 million elephant rides, respectively (World Animal Protection, 2017). In their most recent publication on captive elephant welfare they report that in Thailand alone, 2,242 (77%) of elephants used in tourism are kept in severely inadequate conditions, at venues rated 5 or less out of a possible 10 for welfare. Additionally, it has been noted that there has been a rise of inauthentic sanctuaries where good welfare is boasted yet, not always truly prioritized. While this is disconcerting, it also may indicate

that tourists are beginning to demand sanctuary-type or ‘natural’ experiences, which has lead to more operators attempting to represent that niche.

WAP (2017) listed eight sanctuaries that scored a 9 or 10 out of a possible 10 for best welfare conditions in Thailand, with an additional 4 sanctuary-like (no riding, limited engagement) venues that had opened after their report was created (scores unknown). In order to have earned such a rating, these operators focused on providing tourists with primarily observational experiences of elephants and did not offer elephant rides or any other type of exploitative elephant entertainment. Additionally these venues limited direct contact with elephants or restricted completely. They provided free-range opportunities for elephants all day, allowing them to socialize in natural herds. They also gave access to rivers and natural habitat for foraging and also trained their mahouts to manage the elephants humanely. According to WAP “In Thailand, 248 elephants were kept at venues with scores between 8 and 10- a significant increase from the 75 elephants in similar circumstance in 2010” (2017, p. 47). This is an important indication that welfare is increasingly being prioritized however, it should be noted that there has also been an increase in number of elephants in poor and moderate welfare conditions This speaks to the diversification in elephant experiences demanded by tourists visiting Thailand. Although this variability is a far from perfect scenario for the elephants, one of the obvious benefits to the addition of more ethical programming is in the improved wellbeing of individual elephants.

In 2009, Kontogeorgopolous conducted a comparative study of elephant welfare in Thailand between three elephant camps in the northern region of the country. Using a

mixed-method approach, he evaluates the values, characteristics and preferences of the visitors to these camps. In his paper, he argues that each of the chosen elephant camps contribute to the improved welfare of the captive working elephants despite their differences in world views (i.e. two were anthropocentric whereas one was eco-centric) (Kontogeorgopolous, 2009). Here, he infers that the lack of protection domestically-based on intrinsic value versus utility-is negated when tourist demand is heightened. In other words, when tourist demand increases at any camp, the value of the elephant- and therefore need for protection- increases too. Additionally, he makes the argument that money flowing into elephant camps can only improve the welfare of the elephant, despite that “elephants in anthropocentric camps live imperfect, compromised lives as the price for enhancing their utilitarian value to humans” (Kontogeorgopolous, 2009; p. 441). In this publication, we see improved welfare explored as an outcome of utility- rather than of care, compassion and human/nature connection.

Duffy and Moore (2011) investigate a comparative case study of elephant trekking and safaris in Thailand and Botswana (respectively). In their publication, they examine the complexities surrounding global regulation of welfare as it contributes to North-South dynamics and points to the necessity for collaboration with on-the-ground operations including NGOs to advance welfare considerations. The authors proclaim that “welfare NGOs more readily map onto the profile of the elephant back safari industry in southern Africa but present more challenges when they are applied to the case of elephant riding in Thailand, where there is a much longer history of using elephants as working animals and the profile of the tourism industry is much more diverse” (p. 594). Here, Duffy and Moore allude to the complexities surrounding regulation of elephant tourism experiences.

Laohachaiboon (2010) conducted another study of Asian elephant tourism. The author explores the development of elephant conservation in a comparative study between two Thai organizations. In this article, the author compares and contrasts each organization's development and subsequent conflicts and challenges collaborating with local communities in an effort to incorporate 'conservation'. Similar to most papers on the subject, Laohachaiboon (2010) speaks to the complexities of diverse local perspectives on the use of elephants, the importance of their welfare and implementation of standardization of care and training.

An edited book by Markwell (2015) entitled, *Animals in Tourism: Understanding Diverse Relationships* contains a chapter on the exploitation of both humans and animals in Thailand. Here, the chapter written by Bone and Bone (2015) infers the striking similarities between the mistreatment of women and elephants in the sex and elephant tourism markets, respectively. Using the 'dart trick' (a performance in which women shoot darts from their genitalia and elephants throw darts using their trunks) to illuminate how both women and elephants are 'othered' via execution of said trick, the authors point to the subjects as merely a product to be consumed by tourist gaze. They explain that women and animals are oppressed in similar ways via containment and control for tourist enjoyment. Bone and Bone (2015) use a post-human and feminist theoretical lens to inform their evaluation of the similarities between elephant tourism and sex tourism and call for people to act responsibly with the 'other' (in this case animals and women). This chapter resonated with my chosen theoretical orientation for this research project and has simultaneously enacted personal critical reflection on the matter.

Rattan, Eagles and Mair (2012) employed a singular case study format in their

evaluation of volunteer tourism as a tool for conservation in Elephant Nature Park located in Chiang Mai, Thailand. In this publication, Rattan et al. (2012) explored a Thai grassroots not-for-profit organization in intent to evaluate volunteer tourism as a means of disseminating conservation awareness to non-volunteer tourists. They found, through the application of survey data that “participants felt volunteer tourism increases awareness about conservation issues and volunteering, makes a considerable contribution to conservation, and brings necessary funding to conservation projects” (Rattan et al., 2012; p. 1). Their study revealed that the model of volunteer tourism at ENP was an effective tool for creating awareness about captive elephant conservation issues in non-volunteer tourists. Interestingly, Rattan et al. (2012) revealed that over a four-week period at ENP, 59.5% of non-volunteer tourists were female. Through post-visit surveys, they also determined that a significantly higher percentage of women were affected by their visit to ENP. In particular, women were less likely to engage in activities such as elephant trekking and feeding street elephants after their visit.

In an op-ed for Gender Forum, Jacqui Sadashige (2015) presents “The Mother of Elephants: ‘Lek’ Chailert, Elephant Nature Park, and the Gendering of Elephant Husbandry”. In this piece, she explores the gendering of elephant husbandry with a case study on Sangduen “Lek” Chailert and her operation of Elephant Nature Park (ENP) in Chiang Mai Thailand. Here, she insightfully demonstrates the interweaving of feminist ideology into the practice of husbandry at ENP and via Save Elephant Foundation. As both a steward to innumerable volunteers and the ‘mother of elephants’ in Thailand, Chailert embodies maternal stewardship, kinship and empathy as her method of approaching rehabilitation for abused and tortured elephants. In doing so, Sadishige says, she gives

hope that we “might rearticulate other formulations, embrace heretofore unimagined possibilities, and ultimately engage in compassionate and cooperative relationships with our non-human counterparts” (Sadashige, 2015; p.7). Lek’s eco-centric ethos builds on the idea that all species, including human beings, have an equal importance and right to exist. Chailert’s ideology reframes animal ownership (a reflection of dominance over ‘other’, foundational to traditional representations of patriarchy) as stewardship and kinship (Sadashige, 2015). Chailert’s interest in protecting and preserving Thailand’s wildlife is beyond any instrumental value and directly refutes the anthropocentric mode of operation currently dominating the industry.

While each of the aforementioned research is useful in its own right, there is opportunity to advance the exploration of elephant welfare in volunteer tourism settings. Studies using an eco-feminist lens (such as Bone and Bone (2015) and Sadashige (2015)) are advancing the critical evaluation of human-animal intersections by pushing the boundaries of consideration. This research project further progresses elephant tourism research by directly contesting the abuse and exploitation rampant in traditional means of elephant tourism. Using eco-feminist philosophy, we challenge and critique the dominant paradigm and seek alternatives that may empower all stakeholders, human and non.

2.2 Animal Welfare

Academic literature has yet to unpack volunteer tourism’s potential impact on animal welfare. Animal welfare is a family of perspectives that deal with scientific and moral questions regarding the use of animals (Fennell, 2013). It is a consideration greater than simply physical health but extends into mental health and wellbeing (Dawson, 1998).

It is agreed that good welfare, at the very least, means that animals are free from debilitating diseases, injury and malnutrition, and that they are not kept in conditions that lead to the development of physical deformities (Wolfen-sohn and Lloyd, 1994; Fraser, 1995; Dawson, 1998). Hewson (2003) presents a more succinct definition by outlining three key variables of welfare: natural living, physiology, and feelings/mental behaviour. While valuable to the critical tourism discussion, much animal welfare literature is specific to areas of science and experimentation, or of domesticated individuals (see: Dawson, 1998; Weiskrantz, 1997; Nesse and Williams, 1995; Fraser and Broom, 1990; Rollin, 1995) while non-human tourism agents are neglected. Indeed, the use of animals to satisfy human interest is mainly discussed on the precedence of quality of life rather than if animals should be used at all (Bekoff and Nystrom, 2004). Principle to their argument is that use of animals by humans is justifiable when treated 'well' and that the benefits gained by humans via their usage outweighs all (Bekoff and Nystrom, 2004). Although, it has been argued that the simple factor of inhibiting the performance of instinctive natural behaviour is, in itself, a recipe for poor welfare (Dawson, 1998). Hall and Brown (2006) advocate for animal welfare as it improves the viability of tourism operators. Simply stated, it is better for business to present healthy animals, although this notion does not always reflect the reality of the tourism industry.

As mentioned in section 1.2, much of the animal welfare in tourism discourse is being spearheaded by David Fennell (2012b/c, 2013, 2014, 2015) with an additional narrow scope of studies by other authors. Moorehouse, D'Cruze and Macdonald (2017) unpack the tendency in wildlife tourism attractions to enable poor welfare in their recent publication. They argue the prioritization of tourism profit over ethics have led to

substantial welfare and conservation troubles. Here, the authors determined that tourists are generally unequipped to identify and assess tour operations that retain objectively poor ethical standards as evidenced through overwhelmingly positive reviews on Trip Advisor (Moorehouse et al. 2017).

Bach and Burton (2017) used a case study on dolphin feeding in Western Australia to explore the willingness of tourists to engage in practices where welfare was prioritized over their proximity to the animals. Their study concluded that while visitors placed the greatest value on vicinity and predictability, they were willing to trade off these aspects if they improved dolphin welfare. This speaks to the importance of tourist education in ethical operations where welfare is prioritized. By informing the visitors on why restrictions are made, Bach and Burton (2017) determine welfare support may be achieved.

The significance of animal welfare as a consideration in the context of tourism, and elsewhere, has been highly contested in the literature and media (i.e. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, World Animal Protection, Born Free Foundation) and rarely is separated out from general environmental ethics in academia (Hughes, 2001). This lack of separation, in my opinion, grants animal welfare and ethical consideration to be lost in the complex realm of environmental ethics. To compound this confusion, little attention has been given to operations involving captive individuals as most studies draw attention to interactions with those in the wild (Hughes, 2001). Fennell (2013) shares that animal welfare studies have been limited to general applications, case studies and zoos. In fact, there is little scholarship to palpably represent the sheer scale of the issues regarding

insufficient welfare for animals in tourism (Fennell, 2013) and even less investigating the use of animals on moral grounds (Fennell, 2012). Moreover, there is a gap in the literature regarding inquiry into tourist perceptions of animal use in entertainment settings.

2.3 Volunteer tourism

Volunteer tourism is one of the fastest growing niche tourism markets in the world (Mostafanezhad, 2013). Generally fueled by altruism and self-interest (Grimm and Needham, 2011), volunteer tourists pay to contribute to causes important to them (aiding or alleviating poverty, environmental conservation research etc.) (McIntosh and Zahra, 2009). Coghlan and Fennell (2009) have argued that motivators volunteer tourists possess can be attributed to social egoism whereby values such as advancement over others and self-gratification are promoted. Clinging to the promise of “tangible and direct improvements” to host communities and environments, volunteer tourists are marketed as the answer to the problems that arise in traditional forms of tourism (Sin 2010: p. 983) although, there has been limited research on if and how these *promises*, in the form of volunteer projects and exchanges, are actualized long-term (Sin, 2010).

In some cases, the ‘change’ volunteers wish to create may be sold by the sending organization and consumed by the tourist and can be viewed as a commodified short-term exchange (Raymond and Hall, 2008). This can be complicated by the production of what Gray and Campbell (2007) call, eco-imperialism. In their study, they noted that volunteer tourists criticized local people for valuing turtles based on generated tourist revenue rather than their species at risk status. In other words, there may be a tendency in volunteer tourists to condemn host communities for managing animals based on

instrumental instead of intrinsic value. Indeed, Simpson (2004) further indicates that the values of the developed countries are embedded in some volunteer projects and may patronize, trivialize or romanticize the issue- which fails to acknowledge the contextual complexities that enable the circumstance to occur. To compound this tendency, scholars have argued that there is a propensity to neglect local perspectives on volunteer tourism development work and in doing so, perpetuate the conceptualization of the 'other' (Guttentag, 2009). Regrettably, this phenomenon in relation to volunteer tourism's intersections with the *non-human* other has not been considered in tourism research. In fact, Wearing and McGeehee (2013) presented a succinct review of the state of volunteer tourism in both academic literature and praxis and the authors completely neglected the intersection of humans and non-human animals save for a brief mention that scientific-based volunteer programming can involve "wildlife, land and water" (p.121). Similarly, McGeehee (2014) explores the evolution, current issues and musings for future research in volunteer tourism and lists, technology, certification and religion/spirituality as integral considerations for the sustainability of the industry and once again, fails to mention concerns extending past human interest. As such, it is difficult to provide a holistic perspective on the implications of elephant-based- or even wildlife-based-volunteer tourism as it is disproportionately considered despite their diverse and extensive intersections with the tourism sector.

Notwithstanding the noted criticisms, volunteer tourism is said to consider morality, ethics and responsibility (Sin, 2010). Sin (2010) unpacks that this form of tourism ought to be concerned with "ethical issues [surrounding] working conditions, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities; about who benefits; about the

environmental consequences; and about whether or not traveling to a particular place supports democracy and human rights or undermines them” (Goodwin and Francis, 2003: p. 275). I would advance this notion a step further to include non-human tourism stakeholders given the complexities and ethical concerns surrounding their employment and utility in the tourism industry. Bringing together the ‘two-worlds’ grants personal engagement between the tourists themselves and the ‘other’ that they committed to responsibly contribute to (Sin, 2010). Here, we see the concept of “caring from a distance” whereby those prescribe to the notion of caring beyond one’s self by considering the sameness between ‘us’ and ‘others’, regardless of our differences (Silk, 1999; Sin, 2010). Tourists participating in volunteering activities are affected by their experiences at host sites, thereby gaining more profound appreciation and consideration of the social and cultural environments they visit (Weaver, 2001; Rattan et al., 2012). Additionally, as introduced in section 1.2.3, engagement in volunteer tourism can be visualized as an expression of values as *ethical* consumers and may “enact political and moral concerns” through their choices therefore labeling themselves as ethical (Varul, 2009; Boluk and Ranjibar, 2014). Boluk and Ranjibar (2014) contend that through the consumption of volunteer tourism, travelers may be similarly engaging in a visual display that alludes to their dedication or extension of their values in their travel behavior. This process of using volunteer tourism to craft oneself as a moral subject devoted to caring for others and doing “good” in the world reflects what Varul (2009) describes as ‘ethical selving’. Using this notion, we can explore the idea that tourists who engage in elephant-based volunteer programs express their value attributed to captive elephant welfare through their involvement.

Weaver (2005) discusses that “effective interpretation can have a ‘transformative’ effect by inducing among participants in volunteer tourism a deeper understanding of the attraction and consequent adherence to a more ethical and environmentalist ethos” (p. 441). Due to the unique nature of volunteer tourism, tourist experiences are said to become “an ongoing process” which extends beyond the initial visit (Wearing, 2001; p. 9). It can provide benefits to wildlife by influencing environmental behaviour by heightening understanding of the role that conservation has in the protection of species (Rattan et al., 2012). By giving tourists the opportunities to participate in close proximity to animals exhibiting natural behaviour in a natural environment, it is argued that experiential learning and visitor satisfaction is strengthened (Ballantyne et al., 2007). This can be applied further to the local communities’ involvement in volunteer programming and the development of meaningful cross-cultural exchanges, such as that between tourists and Mahouts.

2.3.1 Elephant-based volunteer tourism

The topic of volunteer tourism in relation to animal welfare is in its foundational years. Rattan et al. (2012) explain that most literature focuses on the volunteer tourist and the host community. While this study similarly investigates perspectives held by volunteer tourists, it does so to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of those engaging in VT programming where elephant welfare improvement is the objective. Additionally, there is little information on how voluntourism may function as a tool in species preservation other than in labour and funding of scientific research (Campbell and Smith, 2006, Brightsmith, Stronza and Holle, 2008). Due to the evident gap in volunteer tourism literature directly pertaining to the case at hand, one must pull from existing texts

concerning volunteer motivations (Grimm and Needham, 2011; Bruyere and Rappe, 2007) and experiential learning through VT (Walter, 2016) and nature based tourism (Finkler and Higham, 2004; Zeppel and Muloin, 2008) to provide insight. Furthermore, Rattan et al.'s (2012) scholarship focused on volunteer tourism potential to engage non-volunteer tourists in elephant conservation awareness is pivotal to the development of this study.

Experiential learning and the acquisition of knowledge are fundamental components of volunteer tourism. Ballantyne and Packer (2011) demonstrate that ecotourism and nature based tourism enterprises where learning opportunities take place play an important role in influencing environmental behavior, animal knowledge and conservation intentions. Further, Ballantyne, Packer, Hughes and Dierking (2007) suggest that providing visitors with the opportunity to witness animal behaviour in close vicinity, in a natural environment, strengthens the learning experience. Studies by Orams (1997), Zeppel and Muloin (2008) and Rattan et al. (2012) have each alluded to the potential for these experiences and gained knowledge to increase support for wildlife conservation, environmental awareness and species protection. Knowing this, while concurrently acknowledging the abusive tendencies dominating the industry, volunteer tourism may provide a 'best of both worlds' in that elephant welfare can be upheld and volunteer tourists can retain information and choose to engage in advocacy.

Volunteer tourism, generally, can be viewed as a more ethical way to engage with captive elephants in Thailand. This form of alternative tourism is operated by sanctuary-type venues and organizations that employ a more hands-off approach to tourist-elephant interactions in effort to prioritize welfare. Typically, these programs have a higher cost

and longer duration than traditional forms of tourism (i.e. jungle trekking, circuses, shows etc). Furthermore, volunteer programs require sometimes grueling work including planting and harvesting of crops, cleaning and maintaining of sanctuary grounds, food preparation and other tasks (Rattan et al., 2012). As such, volunteer programming commonly attracts tourists interested in investing their time and money into a valued cause. The fees volunteers pay help to provide care for the elephants and other animals, project development and improvement, community outreach and support and educational initiatives (Save Elephant Foundation, 2017) or a variation. The appeal of volunteer tourism with elephants, besides experientially, is in the potential added benefits to its implementation, namely contributing to the improvement of individual lives of retired elephants. As Save Elephant Foundation states on their website, one of the main intentions of their operation is to create an international volunteer community dedicated to spreading awareness and advocating for elephant welfare. The potential for elephant based volunteer tourism to provide mutual benefits will be unpacked further in this paper.

2.4 Eco-feminism and Feminist Care Theory

Eco-feminism, or ecological feminism, is a branch of environmental and animal advocacy movements within the realm of environmental ethics (Yudina and Fennell, 2013). While there is no single, foundational theory associated with eco-feminism, it is rooted in the 'othering' of women and non-human animals/nature under patriarchal domination. In patriarchal paradigms, there is an oppressive duality between culture/nature, male/female, mind/body, reason/emotion, universal/particular, and self/other (Plumwood, 1993). Here, the first of the pair (typically masculine) is dominant

while the feminized second is subservient to the first (Adams, 1993; Yudina and Grimwood, 2015), creating a hierarchal, oppressive relationship. The 'other' is disconnected from men and the "result of this long history of dualistic thinking has been ruthless exploitation of women, animals, and all of nature" (Kheel, 1996; p. 18). Kheel (2009) shrewdly argues, "women and nature are the 'other,' they do not conform to the masculine norm, they are objects and property that exist as means to an end" (Yudina and Fennell, 2013; p. 56). Eco-feminist thought rejects this form of thinking by flattening the binaries formed by Western duality in favour of non-hierarchal, pluralist morality by privileging all stakeholder interests in the particular case at hand.

The discussion on non-human animals regarding the morality and ethical considerations of their use has been limited through an eco-feminist lens- most poignantly in the tourism literature. Yet, influential male philosophers arguing a utilitarian approach (Singer, 1981) and animal rights perspective (Regan, 2001) have become influential in the debate further facilitating a masculine-dominated perspective. Kheel (2008) argues that these viewpoints are devoid of empathy and care for individual non-human animals. Additionally, contextual details become extraneous leaving out essential underpinnings such as "historical, social, economic, familial, and other details [...] that seem crucial to an assessment of a situation, a decision, or a character" (Slicer, 1991: p. 113) - which is fundamental to the eco-feminist school of thought. Emmerman (2014) points to context-specific cases viewed in a non-hierarchal, moral pluralist evaluation. In other words, eco-feminism removes the 'us' and 'them' logic by viewing interests of all stakeholders equally rather than privileging patriarchal interests.

At its core, eco-feminism recognizes that empathy connects us to the rest of the natural world and allows us to become aware of the interests and needs of individual beings (Kheel, 2009). Here, is the manifestation of the phrase, 'ethic of care' which emphasizes "the role of empathy as a vital link between humans and the rest of the natural world" (Kheel, 2009; p. 45) and encourages people to engage their sympathies toward the wellbeing and integrities of individual animals as well as larger wholes (Kheel, 2008). Contrary to other environmental and animal ethics (e.g. eco-centrism, utilitarianism, and animal rights) paradigms which advantage reason over emotion, eco-feminist approaches prioritize the individual, contextual, emotional, and political dimensions of ethical issues (Donovan, 2006). Donovan (2006) states that by learning "to hear, to take seriously, to care about what animals are telling us" (p.324), a political cognizance can develop that positions awareness and action towards environments where suffering, and caring about suffering, can transpire (Adams and Procter-Smith, 1993; Yudina and Grimwood, 2015). As Bertella (2014) notes, an ecofeminist approach to exploring human-animal relationships in tourism is particularly valuable as interspecies interactions are seen as meaningful encounters (Donovan and Adams, 2007).

The objectives of my research project mirror Fennell's (2014) concern about the negligence in alternative tourisms pertaining to issues of power that extend beyond dealings within the human species: he asks, "If responsible tourism is really about how to amend power imbalances between the haves and have-nots, should it not have inter-species relevance in the same way it works to minimize intra-species disparities?" (p. 991). This study critiques power differentials between humans and animals and, in likeness to Yudina and Grimwood (2015) engages ecofeminism through the "restoration of

emotional responses- sympathy, empathy and compassion"- as important ethical and epistemological sources for human treatment of the non-human other (Donovan, 2006).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The following chapter outlines methodology, methods and analyses utilized to stimulate stories from tourists who had volunteered with elephants in Thailand in order to develop understanding on their perceptions of elephant welfare, their journeys to engaging in volunteer tourism and the perceived impact of their experience.

3.0 Methodology

For the purpose of this research project, I deployed a qualitative inquiry informed by aspects of case study and narrative methodologies. In doing so, a social constructionist epistemology was employed to grant the researcher to be an interpreter throughout the research process (Crotty, 1998). Narrative analyses have been gaining traction in tourism research over the last few decades (Mura and Sharif, 2017). The employment of said methodology is focused on the study of narratives and representations of reality (Mura and Sharif, 2017) and has been cited as a powerful tool to explore the complexity of social realities and agents (Czarniawska, 2004). Narrative analysis was chosen as a lens from which to explore, through participant stories, their perceptions of social realities, in this case welfare conditions of captive elephants in Thailand. By analyzing the way individuals construct and represent events of their life, “we can take a picture of social phenomena at the macro level as narratives are “situated” in a particular socio-cultural context” (Mura and Sharif, 2017 p. 195). Of particular interest is the notion of the narrator, listener and actors in realm of narrative analysis and that the audience (reader) plays an active role in the consideration of the narrative at hand (Mura and Sharif, 2017).

Case studies can be used to bring awareness to critical issues while attempting to enact change (Berbary and Boles, 2014), which is precisely the goal of this endeavor. If used effectively, this approach may function as a catalyst for the liberation of its subjects, in this case captive elephants. Volunteer tourists have the unique position to recount their experiences in engaging with elephants that have been abused and retired from the tourism industry, engage in advocacy and therefore contribute to the awareness of welfare issues.

In the initial planning stage of this thesis, my intent was to volunteer at an elephant-based sanctuary in Thailand and interview other volunteers in situ in January of 2017. I was seeking to understand the lived experiences of volunteers as it was happening and encourage critical reflection through the use of one on one interviews and focus groups. Due to a myriad of complications that included an extensive timeline required to be granted permission to conduct research from the Thai government and a potential partnership with a sanctuary abruptly ending, the direction of this thesis inevitably changed. In November of 2016, recognizing that I was legally unable to conduct research in Thailand and that the flight was already booked, decided to fly there anyway and embrace the trip as an opportunity to once again connect with elephants personally. While I was there, Phuket Elephant Sanctuary launched their volunteer program and in January of 2017 I was their first and only volunteer for the week of January 9-13. The experiences I had during my volunteering developed another layer to my comprehension of elephant sentience and the deep impact that can be felt while volunteering with elephants. Upon my return to Canada in February of 2017, I exercised adaptability and reworked my methodology such that I would interview past elephant-based volunteers.

3.1 Methods

3.1.1 Research Ethics

Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Waterloo's Office of Research Ethics. Participants were given chosen pseudonyms, as suggested by Veal (2011), to ensure anonymity and maintain privacy. Files containing names of participants with their pseudonyms were not kept with their interview as this would compromise confidentiality. Additionally, all data analysis documents (i.e. transcripts, summary documents etc.) did not have pseudonym or actual name of participant; instead, they were identified using P (participant) and a number signifying their order of interview (ex. Participant Number 4= P4). The pseudonyms were stored in a Microsoft Excel file kept separate from the interview files and were only used during the writing of this research paper. To address discretion, all participants signed a written consent form prior to the interview and sent it electronically through email.

3.1.2 Data Collection

From February 22nd to April 18th, 2017 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from Canada, The United States, Scotland and The Netherlands (see Table 1). To recruit participants, a Facebook post (see Appendix A) was created that requested friends and family share the post with their networks. The only criteria used to choose a participant was that they had volunteered in Thailand with elephants for at least 5-7 days (typical minimum length of volunteer programs in Thailand). This was decided in order to classify the participant as a volunteer rather than visitor as the volunteer tourism industry was of specific interest. Age, gender, nationality

etc. were not considered criteria as the scholarship was solely focused on participant perceptions of elephant welfare. Rattan et al. (2012) had conducted a similar study with non-volunteer tourists and elephant conservation awareness in Thailand. As such, this research sought to extend Rattan's work and further contribute explorations on volunteer tourism as a tool for conservation. A standard interview protocol was followed, whereby instructions were given to interviewees, questions were asked, followed by probing to encourage participants to explain their ideas in more detail (Cresswell, 2014). In order to reflect the philosophical and methodological approach to this study, conversations were meant to be conversational in style and based on the reflective narratives and ideas of the participants. The intention of free-flowing conversation was shared with participants during the introductory paragraph read to them before the interview started see Appendix B. As such, participants were welcome to set the pace of their discussions and my role as a researcher was to listen, clarify, probe, and introduce new ideas (Cresswell, 2014). Recorded interviews were then personally transcribed with permission from the informants.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Participant	Date of Interview	Length of Interview (mins)	Nationality	Volunteered at	Additional Information
Molly	Feb 22/17	32	Canada	Wildlife Friends Foundation Thailand (WFFT)	First international travel experience

Lauren	Mar 2/17	45	Canada	WFFT and elsewhere	Founded ethical wildlife-based volunteer sending organization
Vanessa	Mar 15/17	52	Netherlands	Elephant Nature Park, Surin Project, Boon Lott's Elephant Sanctuary, Phuket Elephant Sanctuary	Volunteered the last seven years with elephants in Thailand at various projects
Wendy	Mar 16/17	38	Canada	WFFT	Volunteered through Lauren's sending organization
Teresa	Mar 20/17	49	Canada	WFFT	Volunteered through Lauren's sending organization
Celina	Mar 21/17	49	U.S.A	Elephant Nature Park, Surin Project, Journey to Freedom, Hope for Elephants	Wrote a book about her experiences with elephants
Tara	Mar 22/17	50	Scotland	Surin Project	Volunteer

					Coordinator for Surin Project for three years
Kristen	Mar 23/17	24	Canada	WFFT	Volunteered through Lauren's sending organization
Lindsay	Mar 23/17	82	U.S.A	Elephant Nature Park, Surin Project	Says all travel is conservation- based, repeat volunteer
Heather	Apr 2/17	41	Canada	Volunteered in Surin, did not disclose if it was the Surin Project	Booked through sending organization previously used to volunteer with turtles in Costa Rica
Margaret	Mar 21/17	52	Canada	Did not disclose	Volunteered and worked for organization for 10 months
Danielle	Apr 19/17	29	Netherlands	Elephant Nature Park, Phuket Elephant Sanctuary	Lived in Thailand for seven years volunteering at gibbon project

A snowball sampling technique, using a social media platform, proved incredibly effective to collect participants for this study. Of note, Louise Rogerson, Director of Phuket Elephant Sanctuary and founder of E.A.R.S. Asia shared my Facebook post with her following as we had developed a friendship through my volunteer placement. Due to her influence in the elephant conservation realm, many participants answered her shared post and became participants in this study. I grant the diversity in participant nationalities to Louise as her network stretches worldwide.

The prospective participants reached out via email and an interview was scheduled. The method of interview was conducted via telephone, Facebook Messenger audio or Skype. The participant chose the medium and date of interview. All interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and uploaded electronically into individual folders labeled (P1, P2 etc) corresponding to the order of interview taken. At the beginning of each interview, I reminded participants of their ability to withdraw from the project at any time. Each participant was told at the end of each interview that they will remain anonymous and that a pseudonym will be used in any and all documentation of their testimony. The interviews ranged from 24 minutes to 82 minutes. After transcribing the interviews I emailed the transcripts back to the participants for them to read over and clarify any details I may have misheard or misinterpreted.

3.1.3 Data Analysis and Representation

Interviews were recorded following an interview guide, which is provided in Appendix B. Interviews were transcribed personally for the analysis portion of the study.

Transcribing my own interviews aided in the analysis portion of this study, as I became more familiar with the data throughout this process.

Analysis of narrative is similar to other traditional qualitative analysis techniques, and essentially involves deconstructing participants' stories into various themes, and examining the interconnections between each story (Glover, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1998). Polkinghorne (1998) states that this form of thematic analysis "results in descriptions of themes that hold across the stories, or in taxonomies of types of stories, characters, or settings" (p. 12). While analysis of narrative focuses specifically on the themes or elements that hold across the stories, I also used tenets of grounded theory in open coding techniques to be able to determine the resulting themes from participant stories (Charmaz, 2006).

Charmaz writes, "coding means categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48). Coding appears to be the first step in organizing data, which is to be interpreted. Recurring themes that arise will be categorized as key concepts and given subsequent codes. Charmaz (2006) explains that this is the best approach, to see what presents itself in the data rather than applying preexisting categories. I used colour coding via pencil crayons to distinguish emerging themes. While the process employed is lengthy, it was the result of meticulous practice in condensing material. By conducting many of these steps by hand, it granted me the ability to work closely with the data and try to establish connections between participants testimony, carefully.

3.1.3.1 Analysis Process

Once transcribed, I printed each interview and bound them, to keep all of the interviews together. I began to process my data by first reading through the transcripts to familiarize myself with the participant's stories. I wrote out my four research questions and numbered each line of the transcript.

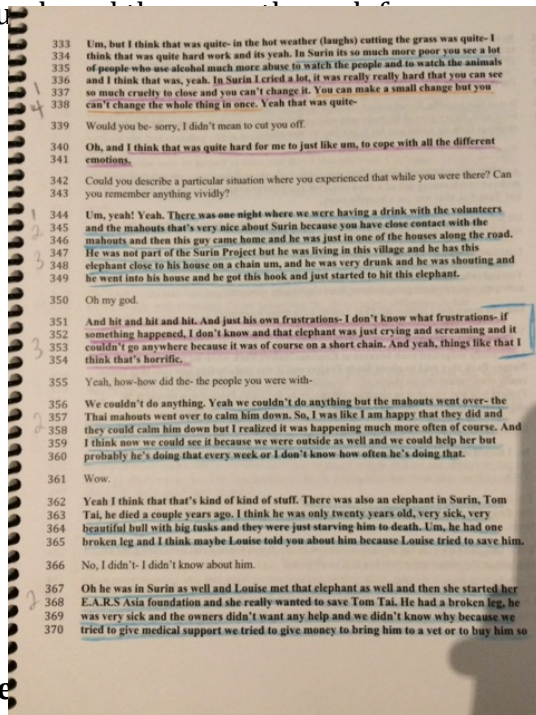


Figure 1. Transcription numbering

I then read through the transcripts again and began writing the number of the research question(s) that pertained to the particular passage of text. I wrote the number in the left margin in pencil and also colour coded (Figure 1). This initial process was a good way to explore participant stories and begin to understand how they were answering my research questions.

Next, I started a new Word document for each participant. In this new Word document I went through the digital typed transcript and copied and pasted each line (including line numbers) that pertained to Research Question 1 (that I had marked with

pencil in the hard-copy version). This was done for each research question to create one “summary” document encompassing all relevant text separated by research question. This step gave me a third opportunity to scan the transcript and ensure all text that I felt pertained to a certain research question was included in the “summary” or “relevant text” document (Figure 3). After printing the “summary” word document, I began to read over and start to code each line with a word or summary phrase (in pencil in the margin) that I felt best pertained to that line.

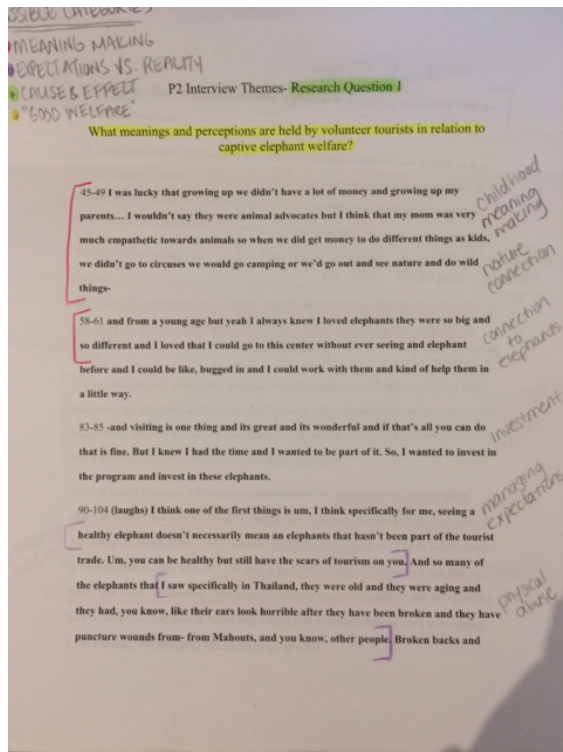


Figure Two: Summary document showcasing relevant text for Participant 2, Research Question 1

I then hand-wrote a “key take away” page (see Figure 3) that listed all of the words or summary phrases for each research question for each participant. This process was created to ensure that information was being concisely condensed to ease the process of

establishing themes across transcripts. I paper-clipped the “key take away” page to the typed summary pages such that verbatim quotes (including line numbers) were readily accessible when needed.

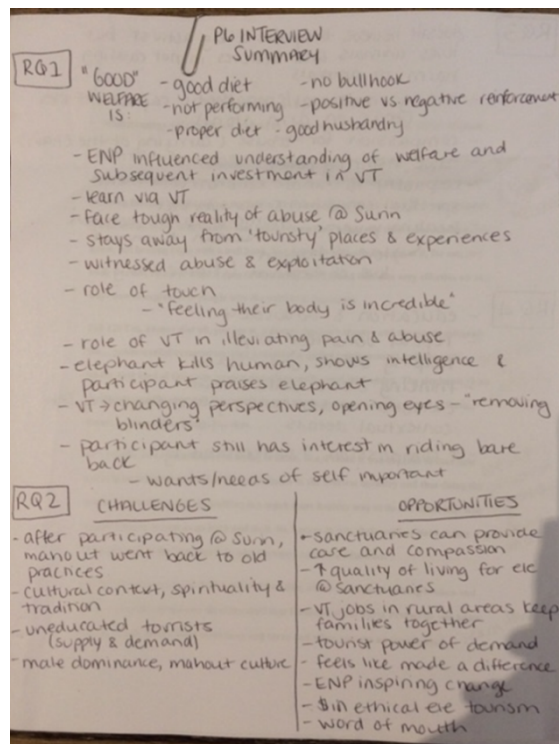


Figure Three: Key take away page for Participant 6, which summarizes relevant text and main points of interest for all research questions (pictured: research question 1 and 2)

All research questions were completed in this manner for each participant before moving to the next to ensure I had the opportunity to fully immerse myself in their story. I read and re-read each “key take away” page to understand what information was common amongst informants and also ideas that were unique to the participant. This allowed me to compare information in a more succinct and simple manner. I began to write on a blank page statements or summaries of statements that I had seen repeatedly. For example, “many came out of volunteering with more respect and understanding for Mahout perspective” or “‘bucket list’ mentality serving tourist desires over elephant welfare”.

Beside the summary statement I began to list the line numbers of participants that allude to the statement (i.e. P11- 195-220, P7 366-384). This process created about 15 summary statements. (see Figure 4).

EMERGING THEMES		
'BUCKETLIST' MENTALITY SERVING TOURIST DESIRES OVER ELEPHANT WELFARE	P7 219-222	P7 152-155
	P10 41-53	P9 102-107
	P7 90-95	P9 171-174
	P11 140-141	P5 443-444
OR		
IGNORANCE OF TOURISTS PERPETUATES EXPLOITATION	P11 162-165	P2 182-185
	P11 369-374	P6 500-513
	P3 255-256	P8 215-217
	P5 443-444	P7 132-138
KNOWLEDGE & UNDERSTANDING	P2 135-138	P2 181
	P2 205-214	P11 146-152
MANY CONCERNED ABOUT 'FREE SANCTUARIES' MISLEADING PROSPECTIVE TOURISTS TRYING TO MAKE ETHICAL CHOICE	P8 46-50	P3 180-183
	P2 441-445	P3 510-515
	P3 562-567	P10 101-112
	P10 531-540	P10 542-547
↳ WOULD BEGIN TO EXPLOIT VOLUNTEER TOURISTS FOR PROFIT		
WITNESSING OF ABUSIVE ACTS ON ELEPHANTS DEEPLY IMPACTFUL	P5 266-276	P3 326-341
	P9 191-193	P3 395-399
	P9 215-219	P3 362-381
	P6 159-162	P2 264-267
	P5 243-247	P2 183-187
	P5 206-207	P2 276-297
	P8 140-142	P10 223-225
	P10 252-254	P10 318-323
	P10 405-414	P10 735-740
	P10 202-218	P10 227-230*
	P10 312-317	P7 132-136

Figure Four: Emerging themes document outlining trends that routinely emerged (with associated line numbers for reference)

I read over these statements and read over my research questions to look for connections between them. By scanning the condensed material I was able to sift the statements into broader categories and develop the foundation for the research outcomes chapter of this study: antecedents for welfare advocacy, unpacking welfare and exploring volunteer tourism potential.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH OUTCOMES

The purpose of this qualitative research was to understand volunteer tourist perspectives of captive elephant tourism in Thailand. Objectives of this research were to interpret stories and meanings of elephant welfare held by volunteer tourists and assess the potential of volunteer tourism to aid in the improvement of captive elephant welfare. This chapter presents results from the data collection process with volunteer tourists across Canada, the United States, Scotland and the Netherlands and will reveal the various themes uncovered through participant story sharing of their experiences volunteering with captive elephants.

First, “Antecedents to welfare advocacy” entails the exploration of how participants came to know and understand their place as champions for the welfare of captive elephants. Next, the proceeding section seeks to remedy volunteer tourist perceptions of welfare and the intersectionality of human and non-human wellbeing. The final portion of this chapter will expose the challenges associated with current modes of tourism production and consumption in the Thai elephant industry. Particularly, it reflects on the dichotomous nature of its execution and questions if the employment of volunteer tourism truly addresses these problems.

4.1 Antecedents to Welfare Advocacy

Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that the volunteer tourists developed understanding for captive elephant welfare through a process of engagement. In this context, the process is ascribed to the progression whereby volunteer tourists began attributing value to captive elephant welfare. This development of understanding was

evident as participants began to share their journeys to volunteering and was particularly obvious in their motivations and reflections on their individual experiences.

4.1.1 Witnessing abuse on captive elephants

Elephant tourism is marketed as an exotic must do for tourists visiting Thailand yet, it was apparent that for many participants the cruelty and abusive acts witnessed on captive elephants was deeply troubling. Seven out of the twelve informants shared explicit memories of witnessing what they perceived as violent acts on elephants. In one transcript, American volunteer Lindsay describes the dyer state of juvenile elephants that were not participating in the volunteer program but living in the vicinity of the Surin Project, many of whom work in tourist entertainment. She says,

Literally under my house where I stayed in Surin there were baby elephants tied up to the posts of my house that were horrifically beaten and I could hear them scream every single day.

She elaborates further to paint a picture of the conditions of other elephants in Surin that were working outside of the volunteer program:

...all of the elephants that are not on the project have chains wrapped around their neck and feet and they have scars from being beaten with bull hooks and if there's not a mahout on the elephants there's a bull hook hanging from their ear as a reminder to the elephant that if they get out of line they will get a severe bloody beating.

Heather, a Canadian volunteer, describes witnessing abuse here as *hard to see* and that *nothing that is said can prepare you for watching what in Western society is considered animal abuse*. Participant Vanessa from the Netherlands, recounts a story of her time

spent in Surin and an abusive interaction she witnessed between human and elephant; she shares:

There was one night where we were having a drink with the volunteers and mahouts and then this guy came home and he was just in one of the houses along the road, he was not part of the Surin Project but he was living in the village and he has this elephant close to his house on a chain and he was very drunk and he was shouting and he went into his house and got this hook and just started to hit the elephant and hit and hit and hit. Just his own frustrations- I don't know what frustrations- if something happened, I don't know and that elephant was just crying and screaming and it couldn't go anywhere because it was, of course, on a short chain and yeah, things like that...I think that's horrific.

It was obvious that this story and her experience volunteering for the Surin Project was quite challenging to her when she goes further to say,

In Surin I cried a lot it was really really hard that you can see so much cruelty so close and you can't change it. You can make a small change but you can't change the whole thing at once. Yeah that was quite [...] hard for me to just like um, cope with all the different emotions.

American traveler Teresa volunteered for the Surin Project and shares a story from her time spent:

Oh it is heartbreaking [...] one of the baby elephants, he was chained up pretty much outside of my house and just watching him strain at his chain all day long just is heartbreaking and then watching the elephants get moved- the ones not on the project- from space to space basically they get to carry their chain with them. Like, not only are they attached to this chain all day when they are moving them to a different location the elephant is carrying the chain as well. So, it is kind of like, you know, burying your own cross in a very literal sense.

This particular narrative (in likeness to the image of a bull hook hanging from the ear of an elephant as shared by Lindsay's narrative) elucidates a troubling depiction of dominance by man over beast with the chain and hook acting as reminders that their fate

is in the hands of their keeper. The almost complete lack of freedom due to physical constraints is a common theme among participant stories and resonates with World Animal Protection (2017) report where the authors reinforce that in many elephant camps across Asia dominance by mahout's is readily displayed by inflicting pain and constant restraint such that the elephant has "no choice but to submit to the mahout's commands" (p14).

4.1.2 Emergence of ethical questioning

It is understood that participants came to recognize, acknowledge and interpret captive elephant welfare in a myriad of ways. Of note was the emergence of moral and ethical questioning of their actions as tourists, the nature of brutality in the industry and involvement of wild animals in touristic activities in general. Canadian traveler Lauren shares a personal story of beginning to question the idea of elephant riding when she says,

Yeah, I remember talking to my friends that had been to Thailand before or was going at the same time and all of them said you have to go on a jungle safari and ride an elephant, you had to be in an elephant basket and I couldn't put my finger on why I didn't like it, it just didn't seem like it made sense. It didn't seem like an elephant would want to be there. [...] even just looking at a bull hook and I thought if an elephant wanted you to ride it you probably wouldn't have to hit it really hard with something that looks like an axe.

In another instance, she speaks about witnessing poor physical condition and the expression of stereotypical behaviour by tethered elephants. She describes herself as feeling *deeply uncomfortable* and suggests that *there seems to be a problem with people and elephants interacting in this country*.

For three years, Tara worked for a volunteer project in Surin where she was a volunteer coordinator. In her narrative she explains that her perspectives on tourist and elephant interactions shifted to prioritize elephant needs over human needs. She began to implement new strategies to manage human-elephant interactions such as the “step back approach” which limited the proximity of tourists to the animals. Here, she explains this transition:

So after that experience and those three years of seeing how I was-people coming in for the first time, you know, touching the elephants trunks for the first time, being right next to them for the first time, I started to see... I don't know, a different side of things because you could see that the mahouts knew that those people really wanted to touch the elephants. They really wanted to be as close to the elephants as possible. So, the elephants got less and less time by themselves or with other elephants free, completely free, to do what they wanted and they were having to spend more and more time with the tourists.

She shares that mahouts would prioritize tourists by coaxing elephants back to be with them for photo-ops. It was at this realization that Tara began to question the morality of tourist-elephant interactions:

So after seeing that for a long time I started to think that you know, were we benefitting the elephants as much as we could be or improving their lives as much as we should be? [...] I started this approach called step back approach and I just tried to educate people on what they would prefer if they put themselves in the elephant's shoes. Would they rather be with the people getting their photos taken all for, you know, a smile, yeah, a memory in a photo that's going to last a lifetime but what does the elephant get from that?

The more time Tara spent observing tourist-elephant interactions the more they troubled her. When asked about the reviews of her new step back approach she says it was mixed stating that while some appreciated the sentiment other tourists were intent on a more

human experience rather than an elephant experience. Similarly, when prompted to unpack whether elephant welfare was important in her decision to volunteer, Canadian traveler Wendy stated it was important to her but her personal motivations and experience was her *prime mover*. She goes on to say,

You know, I wanted an experience where I would be there with animals. [...] I wanted the experience of working with elephants. That's been something that's a driving thing for me most of my life.

While Wendy's perspective was unique in this particular study group, it is clear that some tourists share her human-centered motivation for interacting with captive elephants. American volunteer Lindsay explores this topic when she reveals her opinion on volunteer tourists who may not be fully invested in the welfare of elephants:

[...] their interest is that they want to volunteer with elephants because they want to be exposed and in the company of elephants twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week without actually thinking in the best interest of the elephant.

Further, Lindsay reveals her concern over sanctuaries that still offer elephant rides in their volunteer programming:

A lot of organizations that claim that they are from sanctuaries for elephants and that they have rescued elephants from trekking camps and that their welfare and wellbeing are top priority and I've heard this argument hundreds and hundreds of times that people- tourists- believe that they are doing the right thing and that they made the right choice and now say, I went to a sanctuary [...] but as a volunteer you also get the opportunity to ride bareback and you know, this is what they feel is [good] elephant welfare, but volunteers still get to ride bareback. I don't think that those volunteers think hard enough or deeply enough that what they're doing-you can't- you can't rescue an elephant from a trekking camp to put them in a sanctuary so volunteers can ride them.

What her narrative points to is the spectrum of perceived acceptability in behaviour for volunteer tourists interacting with captive elephants. If the riding takes place in a 'sanctuary' is it better? If the ride is performed bareback rather than saddled, is that considered acceptable? Who decides? These questions, among others, speak to the inconsistency in perspectives on welfare. In one interview, Canadian traveler and volunteer Teresa shared an exchange between her family members, who live in Bangkok, as they questioned the use of captive elephants in disaster relief, clean up. Here, the participant and her family were discussing the result of a tsunami that had hit Thailand and the subsequent damage done to roads and infrastructure. As the damage was too extensive to use large equipment, ex-logging elephants were used to clean up the debris. While the participant claimed to be *shocked and upset* that elephants would be used in such a manner, she goes on to say that her father who witnessed the cleanup first hand interpreted the perspective of the elephants as *providing them a purpose again* and for that they were *really happy*. While she states that she understood the perspectives of her family, she eventually concludes that elephants that have retired should remain that way. However, Teresa also contemplated the use of captive elephants on the condition of improved welfare standards (i.e. hours worked, proper supervision, proper food/water, suitable terrain etc.) and even ponders if the elephants would *be happy to do something they've done their whole life*. Here, she questions working captive elephants and their willingness to continue to serve human interests if higher welfare standards were upheld. Informant Wendy grappled with similar thoughts:

I honestly don't think that elephants would mind helping out except for the way they are treated and they are not all treated badly.

These questions are valid and uncover the contextual intricacy of using wild animals as workers in tourism, particularly those with demonstrated high levels of intelligence and capability to emote. It was not surprising that this was a foundational phase in the building of advocacy as it mirrors my personal experience encountering various forms of exploitative elephant tourism.

4.1.3 Fostering connection

Through the course of their travel and volunteering, participants openly shared their stories in creating, feeling or witnessing connective moments between humans and elephants. While two of the participants suggested that connections cannot be made between human and elephant, it was overwhelmingly clear that others in the study felt differently. In an interview with participant Lindsay, she was so overcome with emotion speaking of her experience that she was noticeably crying. While this occurrence was unique, the presence of connection between traveler and elephant was not. Connection manifested in the form of emotional responses of compassion, comparisons in likeness between human and elephant, and personal stories of spiritual and/or emotional bonding.

Lindsay's emotional testimony of her experience witnessing abuse and the deep compassion she felt for their suffering was palpable. At the height of her emotion, she revealed while audibly holding back tears that witnessing the poor physical condition of elephants and physical acts of abuse *tears apart your soul* and that she can still sometimes hear *the screaming...the screaming* of an elephant being abused. Akin to Lindsay, Laura

says, *it just breaks your heart* while Kristen claims to *feel through them* when speaking of witnessed mistreatment.

Due to the highly intelligent and social nature of elephants, it is no surprise that they have been compared to humans in those realms. As such, it was noteworthy that some participants used similarities to develop and create bonds. For example, elephant personalities were regularly utilized as a demonstrated connector between ‘us’ and ‘them’ with informants recounting individuality and mood fluxes using anthropomorphic descriptors such as *sassy*. In likeness to humans, volunteers interpreted differing behaviour of elephants as representation of their changing mood. Margaret exemplifies this when she shares,

There were other days it seemed as though the elephant was low or hurting and then I felt like I could kind of empathize with them. I felt their sadness with them.

Lauren too revealed that her time volunteering was filled with mixed emotions. She exemplifies this when she says:

I think I’ve definitely felt anger. I think probably what I would think is righteous anger, not at anyone specific. Then just like sorrow. Like, man! Your life was so crappy and I’m so sorry that that happened to you [speaking of the elephants]. But then like the other side of things that I think is important to focus on is that I loved my time there. It was so joyful. It was so wonderful to see the elephants run after each other and trumpet and play. And, um go swimming together and just be silly and yeah, it just makes my heart happy.

In a particularly moving sentiment, Lauren shares how emotional it was to see elephants who have undergone severe trauma behave as if they had not:

All of their shoulders kind of like- just like you could tell they were more relaxed. Their ears started fanning more and they kind of got dozy a little bit...yeah, I was moved to tears that these very specific individual personalities that have these crushing stories of abuse when they were younger were just happy to be together [...] they were happiest when they were just as a herd in the jungle, just being elephants.

And in another excerpt from her testimony she touches again on this when she says:

It makes my heart so happy that these animals aren't broken forever. We shouldn't be so bold to think they would be... that, of course they could be resilient.

Celina, a traveler from the U.S, shared a particularly touching story that demonstrated the significance of her emotional connection with elephants when she uses a comparison to her new engagement. She says,

The unconditional love you know, that kind of, I get the same feeling being with him as I did around the elephants. Yeah, so that's why I feel I am kind of complete. I finally made it to a point where I am happy here at home instead of wanting to move to Thailand. It's kind of where I ran away to for a lot of times but it's also where I healed too.

Celina shared sensitive and personal challenges she has experienced during her interview and it was evident that over her multiple trips to be with the elephants, she received needed emotional and spiritual healing. She validates this when she says:

[...] they are empathetic. You share emotions with them. Like, when their ears are flapping and they are happy it makes you happy and you know, they can sense your happiness and it's easy for me to sense their happiness. It's some of the stillness- just putting your hand on their forehead kind of where their third eye would be [...] you know it's kind of like a connection where you touch and pause and having a still moment with them. I think I have had more reactions except anger...all of the positive emotions I am pretty sure. And then like sadness but that was my own sadness and they took care of that for me.

Through Celina's stories, it can be interpreted that her volunteer trips with elephants were deeply rooted in spirituality and connection rather than plain entertainment. In many ways, Celina's healing mirrors that of the rehabilitated elephants she volunteered with and illustrates their shared resiliency. Due to the highly sentient nature of elephants and emotional capacity of humans, it is easy to understand why feelings of connection and unification are present in many participant stories.

Canadian volunteer Margaret was unique in that she presented a story that did not directly involve her but instead witnessed between a mahout and his elephant:

There was one particular mahout elephant duo on the project um, and so there was an older man that we called Patty-Sai and his elderly female elephant whose name was Tom-Dee um, and the two of them were just like- they were around the same age and she had been in his family for nearly her entire life so they had been around one another and he had been her mahout for so so long that it was just really special to watch them. There would be days, you know, she's an older elephant and the rest of the elephants on project were quite a bit younger than she was and there would be days when she would show her age and was clearly tired or irritable and you would always see Patty-Sai responding to that- just incredible empathy and care for her. So, like there's one memory that stands out to me and like she was really tired and was resting her really long trunk on the ground and what he would do to sort of comfort her was he would go up to her and rub the base of her trunk between her eyes and sometimes he would gently squeeze her eyelids and it was obvious that it was his way of comforting her. So, it was just a really beautiful relationship to be able to see on a daily basis and there were other times when you know, the other elephants would be off wandering and foraging elsewhere and he would find a mango tree that you know, had a bunch of mangos that were ripened and fallen off and he would just go and pick them up and throw them to her. It wasn't always like he was comforting her but he was providing for her and you know, giving her treats. She could have easily gone and got them on her own but he was sort of participating in that part of her daily routine and in that sense, caring for her.

Margaret's testimony points to the spectrum in how tourists experience compassion and understanding connection between human and elephant. In this case, Margaret felt she was

witnessing deep connection through external observation. Whether the bond was felt personally or observed otherwise, elephants prove to create a lasting impression on the volunteers.

While the participant's backgrounds and intentions for volunteering varied some, indications of building engagement with welfare were particularly forthright. It was exemplified that participants were reflecting their ascribed value to captive elephant welfare when they were: sharing acts of abuse witnessed on captive elephants, unveiling ethical questions surrounding captive elephant use in tourism, and describing moments of physical, emotional and/or spiritual connection with the elephants. It appears that in these moments, participants began to develop the foundation for welfare advocacy.

4.2 What is welfare?

To unpack consideration of captive elephant welfare, from the perspective of the volunteer tourist, I began by providing space for them to define it themselves by asking the question, "*What does welfare mean to you?*" or "*What does 'good' welfare look like?*" Here, the intent was to understand the criteria believed to represent a higher standard of welfare. Of this list were the expected; access to ample food, water and natural habitat, and freedom from physical abuse. Almost all of the participants eluded to the idea that 'good' welfare cannot be maintained in traditional forms of elephant tourism being practiced in Thailand (i.e. jungle trekking, circuses and performances) as many cited, '*freedom*' in their answers in regard to elephants deciding what to eat, who to associate with and what actions to choose. For example, Lindsay says, *I think elephant welfare is for an elephant to be able to choose its life.* Asian elephant size, complex sociality, high intelligence, large

home ranges, diverse diet and immense behavioural range complicate the keeping of elephants in captivity (Veasey, 2006).

Canadian volunteer Margaret echoed sentiments shared by other participants regarding physical challenges that complicate welfare yet; she also touched on the immense social isolation that deeply affects them. As a working elephant, social interaction is severely limited or even non-existent between animals and Margaret describes this as, *such a big problem that people don't realize*. Margaret exemplified 'invisible' abuse further when she inferred that people consider cruelty as physical acts of violence when in reality working elephants encounter mistreatment in a multitude of ways:

I find what tends to get overlooked a lot is those daily ways in which elephants needs are not being met; the social, the diet issues, the you know, habitat. [...] People forget about that and focus on the really dramatic humans clubbing elephants with bull hooks sort of scenarios.

Acts of mistreatment 'invisible' to tourists complicates their ability to make informed decisions when interacting with elephants, and animals more broadly, in travel. Unless tourists are educated on what to look for, isolation for example, can be easily overlooked and the problem can be perpetuated. Moorehouse et al. (2015) confirm this trend in a recent study whereby 18/24 types of wildlife tourist attractions surveyed (including elephant riding) had negative impacts on the animals yet very few tourists provided negative feedback. The study concluded that wildlife tourist attractions have substantial negative effects unrecognized by, or concealed from the vast majority of tourists.

Canadian participant Lauren is unique in that she suggests that our ideal notions of ‘good’ welfare may be unattainable in today’s tourism climate. As such, she proposes that we re-think our definition of ‘good’ welfare:

I think specifically for me, seeing a healthy elephant doesn’t necessarily mean an elephant that hasn’t been part of the tourist trade. You can be healthy but still have the scars of tourism on you. I think that what I want a healthy elephant to be may not realistically be what I can see as a healthy elephant.

This is particularly evident due to the process of false-domestication (the *phjaan* or the crush). The grave reality of working elephants in tourism is that in almost all cases, the elephant has undergone this brutal process to deem them usable for work. Lauren touches on this when she recognizes that a broken elephant is an accessible one to tourists. She explains in an example about socialization and accessibility:

It is easier for them to be socialized and it’s easier for us because we did wash them every day and so having a kind of feral, I guess, elephant would not be helpful for washing and the safety of the volunteers.

The dichotomous nature of elephant tourism is exemplified here; tourists demand intimate experiences with elephants (even in volunteer tourism) yet the documented process to get them to that place is ripe with exploitation, neglect and violence. This, coupled with variability in tourist perceptions of welfare, can facilitate an exploitative relationship between elephants and the tourism industry.

4.2.1 Mahout welfare

Customarily, mahouts care for captive elephants and have been for hundreds of years. As such, mahouts have gathered and passed on vast amounts of knowledge about

elephant keeping. Due to mutual dependency, the mahout-elephant relationship is very close and their welfare is inextricably linked (World Animal Protection, 2017). Mahouts must protect their livelihoods while simultaneously caring for their animals (Mahouts Elephants Foundation, 2015). This complicated relationship of capturing and keeping wild elephants and their subsequent training has gained media attention that in many cases have not been positive. According to World Animal Protection (2017) in recent decades there has been an influx of elephant handlers who are not part of the traditional mahout ancestry. As such (and mostly motivated by employment rather than tradition) young generation mahouts lack dedication to the craft and may subsequently engage in acts of cruelty to gain control of their elephant. Mahouts, particularly those with little experience, often reject the idea of giving their elephants more freedom due to the fear associated with losing control. Excerpts from Tara's interview alluded to this when she questioned if some of the mahouts she met truly understood the impact of making captive elephants work for tourists:

[...] maybe they weren't really in the project for the same reason I was. Um, for a lot [of the mahouts] it was still just a job. They didn't really understand that riding and the circus shows were really harmful. Um, just because that's all they've known and they've grown up with and it's from their fathers and grandfathers and it's tradition or its turned out that way even if the traditions turned more abusive than they initially were with the elephants. So, I think it was just a different job not necessarily a better or more positive job. It was just different, a different type of income.

This is not to imply that all mahouts are the same. It is clear when reading interview transcripts that witnessed mahout-elephant interactions were on a spectrum. Tara also shared her experience working with mahouts who were dedicated to upholding welfare:

There were a few who did get it and did want to use their elephants in a more positive way and give their elephants the best life they possibly could which is quite surprising- I think, because it is so engrained in their culture now treating elephants that way and using them for touristic purposes for circuses and such. Those handful of mahouts who I came to know really well did actually care for their elephants, you could see such a difference in those mahouts then the mahouts who didn't really get it and who just- it was just a job.

Interestingly, when analyzing the interview data, five of the participants claimed to have left their volunteer placement with more respect and understanding for the role mahouts play in the lives of elephants. Three other participants expressed interest in growing volunteerism via mahout empowerment in order to assist in improving their current elephant care practices.

Canadian Margaret shares her unique perspective on mahouts and the impact they made on her through volunteering:

The more time I spent there the more I understood about the intricacies of humans keeping elephants and the day-to-day bigger picture stuff of that the more lenient I became. Like, the less set in what I thought was, you know, proper welfare for an elephant. [...] I consider myself an animal welfarist, I really believe that you can't- you have to consider these things within cultural contexts.

She then begins to compare the lives of mahouts to that of the elephants pointing to their shared welfare:

I love animals but I am also a human and I need to be understanding of human circumstances as well and a lot of the time when animals are being poorly treated it's because the humans who are treating them poorly are in some way um, not necessarily suffering themselves but, have circumstances which compel them to act that way towards animals.

Keeping in tone, Heather expressed empathy for the position of the mahout when she says:

I am more compassionate toward the fact that some people feel that they don't have a choice and they have to put their elephant through, you know, whatever awful thing that they've gone through.

Further, Margaret shares that while she felt connected to the elephants she volunteered and worked with, she actually drew closer to the mahouts who kept the elephants and even defended behaviour that some interpret to be cruel:

The more time I spent on project, the more I found myself becoming attached to the people who kept the elephants and being understanding of you know, why they kept the bull hook on them when they were patrolling the elephants around us because you know, otherwise you have this five ton animal running around. Like, your life is at stake.

The bull hook has been a subject of contention, particularly in the media, and is mostly represented as a symbol of dominance and cruelty. It is frequently used in trekking, circuses and performance-based elephant tourism. As such, many sanctuaries have limited or completely removed the option for mahouts to carry and employ the bull hook. Still, we see participants expressing understanding when mahouts opt to use them. Celina unpacked her outlook on the use of the bull hook but also tied spirituality to its use:

They have animalistic beliefs so that spirits are in everything like trees and stuff. So carrying the bull hook for them is two-part: it's that the spirits in the wood and the hook are a protective talisman for them so to ask them to give up the bull hook is very hard for them not because they look at it as a way to use and control the elephant, I mean, it is to control the elephant, but it's their own personal safety and protection. The spirits in the stick are what are protecting them.

Tara's testimony on the subject was unique in that she was employed by a volunteer organization for over three years where she worked directly with mahouts. She describes

the hardships faced by mahouts trying to make a living and support the needs of their captive elephants:

There is no forest left in Thailand. There is nowhere for them to go to let their elephant be free or do something else and it's a huge burden. They have to feed the elephant, care for the elephant, it costs a lot of money so, it's a huge tie for them as well. It's a twenty-four hour job. They don't get many breaks. They don't get to go on holidays. They don't even get to spend much time with their families so I just came to realize that being hateful of all the mahouts was the wrong attitude to have and instead we should be thinking of positive ways to help these mahouts change their lives around so that they don't have to use their elephants that way.

Despite the direct involvement of mahouts in elephant tourism, there seems to be a lack of understanding between tourists and mahouts. In many cases, mahout roles are limited to standing aside during photo ops or manipulating the elephant to accommodate tourist desires. Tara shares that during her time spent volunteering at Elephant Nature Park, and attending for work-related purposes, many of the volunteers did not pay much attention, if any, to the mahouts:

[...] most of the volunteers we spoke to- they just didn't care about the mahouts. All they cared about were the elephants and watching the elephants and doing things for the elephants. The mahouts didn't even come onto their radar.

Similarly, Lauren challenges volunteer operations that fail to integrate local communities into their programming:

We are going and we are helping your elephants, we are doing this grand gesture but then we are not helping local people or having a relationship with the local people. We're not even engaging with them and that's a problem.

Acknowledging the adversity faced by mahouts to maintain livelihood and upkeep welfare, coupled with their consistent overshadowing by their animals seems to create opportunity for disempowerment. In fact, Tara shares that one of the mahouts she worked with expressed just that. She remembers:

There was one mahout that we were friends with and he was the head mahout and he kind of shared with us (because he speaks a little English) that um, he was kind of disappointed that the mahouts didn't have much interactions with the volunteers and the volunteers didn't know much about them.

As a result of this confession, she implemented a special team-building activity that both volunteer tourists and mahouts would engage in to assist with forging relationships and cultivating identity for the mahouts. Following the implementation of this game, she shares:

The mahouts actually felt integrated and wanted and empowered and that's when we really started to see change because then you could see that the mahouts felt a part of the project and they wanted to please the tourists.

While the initial intent was to explore emotional connections formed between volunteer tourists and the elephants, the data shows that mahouts played a crucial role in many of their experiences. Mahout culture is a significant topic of controversy yet, interestingly, many of the participants revealed their recognition of contextual factors that enable exploitation by and to mahouts. Aligning with eco-feminism, intersectionality between the human and non-human is not easily separated therefore we must privilege all stakeholder interests. Participants were readily expressing empathetic responses to both human and non-human circumstance, which developed feelings of connection. This is

reflective of the eco-feminist school of thought chiefly, ethic of care. Such is encouraging as we attempt to move forward to a place in tourism where both human and non may thrive.

4.3 Exploring Volunteer Tourism Potential

It was noticeable in participant interviews that many felt travelers possessing 'bucket list' mentalities, in combination with tour operators prioritizing profit over elephant welfare, is negatively contributing to the elephant tourism industry. Tour operators hold the authority to propagate information to tourists through marketing and promoting of elephant experiences and in many cases are failing to provide tourists with accurate information about elephant welfare effectively hindering their ability to make an informed decision. Yet, we see through these volunteer tourists that while the elephant tourism industry is fraught with cultural and contextual complexities, there are opportunities to empower stakeholders.

4.3.1 Ignorance and deception in elephant tourism

According to Reynolds and Braithwaite (2001), tourists pursuing a 'bucket list' activity may be less concerned with, or likely to detect, negative welfare implications on animals. This mindset may favour exotic experiences over what the individual would typically deem 'normal' or 'right'. Tourists are often seen casting aside morality and value systems of their home country in favour of exotic experiences (Fennell, 1999). This, coupled with travel operators looking to take advantage of tourist dollars, can create a manipulative relationship between captive animals and the tourism industry. Margaret alludes to this when she unpacks this exploitative relationship:

[...] having elephants working in tourism and giving rides to people and letting them put on shows you know, that's kind of created a situation where customer satisfaction and demand fuels what elephants are required to do. You know, people see an elephant giving a ride to a person on TV and they think 'oh my god, I want to go and do that'. So, that sort of demand, I guess, to have this really cool and super close experience with an elephant has really caused a lot of the tourism outfitters to push the limits with what is natural for the elephant.

When asked about her experience riding an elephant, Scottish traveler and volunteer Tara recounts feeling uncomfortable after her tour group had completed the ride and begun to question if it was ethical. To dig deeper, it was asked if she thought others in her tour group were having similar thoughts and she replied:

[...] I think it took me a while to process what I actually thought about it after we had done it. But, I don't think those people felt as guilty as I felt after they had done it. I think it was just like, another experience ticked off the list.

Many participants linked tourist unawareness of captive elephant working conditions as a major obstacle for improving welfare. Teresa references tourist ignorance on the subject when she says,

It's going to be people and their desires to do things without worrying about what could possibly be wrong with what they're doing. [...] the ignorance that people had, and that's not their fault going and they ride an elephant because that's something everyone says you have to do in Thailand.

Similarly, Lauren touches on her perception of tourists casting aside their consideration of ethics surrounding elephant welfare:

We, for so long, have just said, 'oh, elephants are really big so of course they can have that type of weight on them' and it's just a theory of mind that you are very happy to not think of the ethics because why would you have to? You just assume everyone else is thinking about the ethics so I can do these programs".

To put it simply she articulates,

Its people who are lovely but just don't know why they should question it.

It is easily surmised that tour operators play a key role in determining which activities tourists engage in. This can be problematic as many tour operators internationally, and also local to Thailand, still market exploitative elephant-based activities as a must-do.

Participant Teresa expresses her concern on this topic when she says:

Even to the extent that there are still, to this day, companies, tourism companies that promote it and their packages include an elephant ride if they are going to Thailand. If tourism companies are still promoting it [...] that's going to stand in the way of animal welfare and elephant welfare.

Tourism in Thailand has been steadily increasing and has almost doubled in visitors from 2010 (15.9 million) to 2016 (32.6 million) (World Animal Protection, 2017). In 2014 it was reported that in a survey of 1700 tourists to Thailand, 36% interviewed had completed or planned to partake in an elephant ride. This translates to 8.9 million travelers having potentially sought out elephant rides in 2014 alone (World Animal Protection, 2017). This number has increased in 2016 to 40% of surveyed tourists visiting Thailand and 12.8 million elephant rides, respectively (World Animal Protection, 2017). While there has been a notable increase in the number of tour companies distancing themselves from unethical elephant operations, welfare complications are well documented for elephants in captivity, specifically those working in entertainment, making this statistic undoubtedly troubling.

Interestingly, participant Danielle from the Netherlands was a guide for a Dutch company that promoted tourists to go on elephant rides in their tour packages. She explained that she would give her clients all of the necessary information on welfare issues in elephant riding and the spirit breaking process and received backlash from both tourists and the company she worked for. She shares:

I explained it to them and everything but they still wanted to do it so they got really upset about it. Everything I told them you could see it in reality as well so they got really sad about it [...] they'd go for a ride then complain to the company and the company complained to me saying you can't tell them about it.

Here, we see that tourists were upset that their 'bucket list' activity's perception was tarnished by Danielle's affirmation and that the tour operator favoured the ploy of guilt-free elephant riding. She verifies this further:

It's really strange cause I told them everything and they felt really bad about it but they still were like, 'yeah, but we're in Thailand and we're really looking forward cause this is what we wanted to do before we came here and we still want to do it'. They felt really bad afterwards.

Similarly, traveler Lauren recounts her first trip to Thailand and hearing tourists justify their decision to ride an elephant:

So many people who said, 'I love what you're doing [volunteering] and it's so nice and you know elephants don't like it but I just want to ride on them once and then I'll never do it again'

Danielle's statement presents an example of egocentricity that appears to deem the difficult information she shared with the travelers less significant than their initial plan to ride an elephant and via Lauren we see an example of tourists similarly prioritizing self-

interests. It appears through their shared statements that tourists acknowledged welfare concerns yet chose to move forward with their intention to participate in elephant riding which speaks to the range in acceptability of traveler-elephant interactions.

World Animal Protection (2017) reports that most of the elephant venues with higher welfare scores can be found in the North of Thailand near Chiang Mai. In that locale, visitors seem to be inclined to invest more time and money when engaging in elephant experiences. Increased animal welfare consciousness seems to have influenced the elephant tourism market in the northern region evidenced by the immergence in venues that label themselves ‘rescue center’, ‘retirement place’, ‘sanctuary’ or ‘refuge’ (World Animal Protection, 2017). Dutch volunteer Vanessa verifies this happening in her own experiences in Thailand. She states that she believes that trustworthy sanctuaries are making a difference in the lives of elephants however the infiltration of misleading messaging is challenging for visitors:

I think the last few years is sometimes hard to recognize a real good sanctuary because a lot of the Thai former trekking camps now use that term as well.

Although, it is difficult particularly prior to visiting, to determine the level of commitment to improved welfare, which reflects my personal experience traveling and engaging in elephant experiences. Lindsay, an experienced elephant volunteer from the U.S, gives her perspective on this trend in the industry:

[Volunteer tourists] assume the trustworthiness and the honesty with the organization claiming to be reputable people doing good things for the environment and for the animal and they're not. So, when you go and volunteer you are paying the un-reputable organization to do more harm than good. You are paying money and spending your

time and your energy to do something extremely deceptive and I think if volunteers knew the truth they wouldn't be volunteering at those places.

According to World Animal Protection (2017) several camps that used protection-oriented labels when visited had frequent chaining of elephants, strict schedules for elephant activities and sometimes gave rides bareback or saddled. Of note, they also were vague on the method of acquiring their elephants, which may be indicative of wild poaching or similar.

Lindsay expresses that the result of such language can hinder the progress of improving elephant welfare:

I think [volunteer tourism operators] are contributing to animal welfare as long as they are reputable. [...] especially in Thailand there are so many organizations claiming to be sanctuaries and rescues and they are 100% not. They are contributing in a bad way. They are contributing to more exploitation and more misrepresentation and [are] more deceptive to the volunteer.

Vanessa shares her personal challenges in seeking out a genuine sanctuary in Thailand to volunteer for:

I had a look at the different sanctuaries and camps to see what they were doing for the elephants and I think a lot of camps and sanctuaries are still um, it looks like they are acting for the animals but still the elephants need to work and have a day schedule and all that kind of stuff.

The use of ethical-minded language in marketing of elephant activities seems to be reflective of a perception shift but is obviously problematic for tourists attempting to make welfare-friendly decisions. The misuse of terminology may further contribute to the exploitation of elephants under the guise of conservation.

One of the greatest challenges facing elephants is their immense charisma and profitability in tourism. The growing number of elephants in a highly profit-driven industry and the increasing demand for elephant experiences sparks concerns. The high value of captive elephants and permeable borders are drivers for the illegal poaching and laundering of wild-caught elephants in the captive elephant tourism industry (World Animal Protection, 2017).

Vanessa from the Netherlands echoes this when she shares the challenges she perceives for elephants moving forward.

Well, I think there is a lot of money involved with the elephants and I think that is really really hard like, if a sanctuary wants to buy an elephant they have to pay a lot of money because the owners of the elephant know that they can ask for a lot of money and you never know 100% sure if the money will be spent okay of maybe they will buy a baby elephant from Burma [Myanmar] or get a new elephant from the wild. I think that's, yeah, I think that's quite hard because there is so much money involved in that industry.

As introduced in section 1.0, captive elephants are inadequately protected by law and lack stringent regulation, which creates opportunity for misuse and exploitation by their owners and keepers. This was regularly brought forward as a subject of concern for the volunteer participants. American volunteer Lindsay shares her perspective on the matter when she says:

There's no welfare protection for elephants whatsoever. They are just cattle and nothing more. They are not sentient. They are not intelligent. It's just a money making machine.

Canadian traveler Teresa expresses similar concern surrounding the profitability of animals:

The money that can be made in the animal entertainment industry is huge in Thailand and is has been a leader portion of why there has been corruption in the government when it comes to getting zoo permits and things like that.

Additionally, participants expressed concern over the government's lack of support for improving captive elephant welfare. Here, Lindsay explains her perspective:

If the government in any country whether it's the U.S. or Thailand [...] doesn't see the value in eco-friendly tourism as far as wildlife is concerned or habitat is concerned, its exceedingly difficult for an organization like Save Elephant Foundation to make meaningful change because it has to come from the government level. The government has to organize- it has to educate their people in better ways of tourism—that elephants can make more money alive than they can as a trekking camp in the seventy years that they are around. It can benefit the country, it can benefit the villagers, and it can make them more money.

Dwindling forest and protected areas in Thailand means there is a deficit of traditional habitat for elephants. As a result, the somber reality is that captive populations of elephants will likely always need to be in the care of humans as there simply is nowhere else for them to go. This creates a challenge and opportunity for tour operators and elephant owners. In the passage above, Lindsay is insinuating that non-traditional (i.e. observation-based, sanctuary) elephant activities can have a mutual benefit for operators, elephants and tourists. Elephants can live over seventy years and if their welfare and wellbeing is prioritized, that can translate to long-term income. Tourists will pay to see elephants simply being elephants and if ethical sanctuary-based operations can harness that, individual livelihoods can be improved while maintaining profit. With government support and implemented regulation on their welfare, captive elephant involvement in tourism could be re-imagined to benefit all stakeholders.

4.3.2 Opportunities to cultivate advocacy through volunteer tourism

Viewing volunteer tourism a solution to problems posed by traditional forms of tourism can be a subject of contention yet; the testimony of participants has indicated that there are some mutual benefits to its implementation. If operated strategically, volunteer elephant tourism has the capability to empower stakeholders through improved welfare and tourist education. When asked about the role of volunteer programming in improving captive elephant welfare, Canadian Lauren shared,

I think probably because of volunteering with elephants in Thailand specifically, elephants now have a better quality of life in general.

Tara, a Scottish volunteer tourist noted differences between the participating and non-participating elephants, and even their keepers, in the volunteer program in Surin. Although, in this particular excerpt she admits that elephants participating in the volunteer program had improved conditions over their non-participating counterparts. Tara says:

It was still quite hard to see the elephants on the chains at times but you could see the difference between the elephants who were a part of the project and the ones that weren't. Their behaviours were totally different and even the mahouts behaviours were totally different and you could tell that although it wasn't perfect that was a step better or a few steps better than what life could be like for them.

Through the testimony of informants, it is clear that many felt elephants in volunteer-type programming were being met with higher standards of welfare (generally) while some participants still challenged the spectrum of acceptability of their use in

tourism. Canadian volunteer Margaret agrees that lives of individual elephants are being improved but questions if the benefits go beyond that:

I would say for the lives of those individual elephants who were at the project I worked on- I would say it made a difference in the long run for their lives because if they weren't on this particular project they could be based at a camping outside of Chiang Mai giving rides instead of having people follow and observe them. So, for the individual animals I think it made a difference but in the broader circumstances, I would be a bit more skeptical about it.

Similarly, Lauren presents the challenge in variability of organizations prioritizing welfare:

I think all welfare in Thailand has gotten better but, I think that there are some places that are focusing on care for the environment, animal welfare and having like a really good standard and a benefit for the community and there are different places that go like, 'oh, our elephants are like, pretty good- at least they're not being ridden'.

Here, Lauren's testimony mirrors the results of WAP's (2017) report and points to the diversity in elephant venues commitment to maintaining welfare. It is undeniable that the individual wellbeing of elephants retired to sanctuaries is an improvement from a life of trekking and entertainment-based tourist activities. However, there is a need for parameters that determine when and if venues may deem themselves a sanctuary. World Animal Protection (2017) listed "devise a set of elephant-friendly tourism standards" as one of their eight recommendations for the elephant industry moving forward. Here, they argue that standards will assist tourists and travel companies recognize operations that truly prioritize welfare.

While reviewing interview records, several participants cited education and awareness as key components to their volunteer placement. For example, Canadian participant Lauren stated in her interview multiple times that her volunteer placement

impacted her on a level deeper than she anticipated. As such, she, like many others, felt a sense of duty to advocate for elephants following her placement. She affirms this when she explains how, following her volunteer program, she felt she had to share when speaking to fellow tourists: *I have to tell you about why we need to help them and why on their backs is horrific and you shouldn't do it.* Similarly, American participant Celina shares that she *always tells [travelers] if you have the time and want to volunteer it's the best way to interact with [elephants].* Molly, a Canadian volunteer, shared that telling a friend about participating in the interview for this project resulted in a discussion about elephant tourism. As a result, she says, her friend was convinced to not ride an elephant anymore. In another example, Lindsay shares her sense of responsibility in being an ambassador for the cause.

I think my role as an ambassador is to educate anybody and everybody. I know the truth behind unethical tourism and ethical tourism, where not to go and where to go. I think as volunteers we have the responsibility to use our voice to educate people because we have been there, done that. We have seen it not just in a video, not just in pictures on social media, but we've seen it with our own two eyes the actual brutality and I think a lot of people see these videos that circulate on social media and think that was way back then, that doesn't happen now and that's simply not true.

These particular excerpts exemplify that advocating and information spreading is inherent to their post-volunteer experience. Following her volunteer trips, Lauren founded an ethical volunteer sending organization and here she explains how she is attempting to shift ideologies through her platform:

I think a lot of times when I talk to people in interviews or I give talks or I write articles like, I tell people to be critical. And if people go with my company that is obviously great and what I would like I would like more people to be critical and ask those questions and to know that they're investing their time and investing their money and just know where that goes. It is great to volunteer but we have to know that volunteering is not

the only option and I want people to know, yeah, where their money goes and what we're doing and why we're doing it. So, I hope that's my role. I hope people talk with each other more and become global advocates when they come back from programs and before they go on programs research more and want to tell more people about things.

Encouragingly, Canadian Heather said that critical reflection was an integral element to the process at the volunteer program she chose:

The program I went with, part of what they do is they have these leadership sessions about your time as a volunteer and so everyone gets together and you have these big group discussions about everything that you're feeling and everything that you're seeing and how we can, you know, use this information to become better potential leaders in the world.

As many participants noted tourist ignorance as a major obstacle for improving elephant welfare, this critical reflection piece is encouraging in that past volunteers seek to educate others and become advocates. In addition, a few participants cited that they blogged during their volunteer placement which speaks to the rich experiential nature of this form of tourism. In a very real way, tourists hold immense power to influence the elephant tourism industry. Through the simple example of supply and demand, tourists harness the ability to express their values by placing their tourist dollars in the hands of ethical operators. Margaret relates ignorance in tourists to the perpetuation of supply and demand:

I'm a very big believer in that ignorance is the root of many problems and as long as people are coming to Thailand not knowing the horrors of captive elephant tourism and as long as they're wanting to ride an elephant like, as long as the demand is there the supply will be there to meet it. Yeah, so I would say that is quite a big barrier.

Canadian Teresa articulates her perspective on the subject when she says:

The more volunteers that go the more people that are speaking on social media about the atrocities that are happening, the more that is shared the more education there is and there are so many people who say, 'oh my god I had no idea and I rode an elephant when I was younger' or 'yeah, I went to the circus when I was younger and never knew' and you know, were not turning it from pure ignorance to people are actually more aware of how animals are being treated in the entertainment industry. So, I think [volunteer organizations] are contributing to [improving welfare], they are the start of it- the foundation of having people that are dedicated to animals and coming to work with them and sharing the message. That will hopefully prompt change, eventually. If there's nobody there to demand that elephant ride then the industry can't make money and none of those people are in it because they want to ride elephants, they are in it for the money. No money and they stop doing it.

Celina echoes this sentiment when she touches on tourist potential to disseminate information:

Almost that pay it forward thing where if all those people tell three people and they tell three people or whatever that hopefully that will start changing it and help people know that there is a different way to do it. I think also in some ways maybe technology will help too because there is easier access to learn about why riding is bad and you're able to share more about alternatives.

Likewise, Lindsay feels that tourists hold immense power to influence the industry through demanding eco-oriented tourism products:

I think once tourists start demanding more eco-tourism that they would be more willing to change. I think though in order for people to demand eco-tourism there has to be more of that available. I think in order to make that more available the villagers have to see how their income can profit from eco-tourism rather than trekking.

Vanessa from the Netherlands agrees and places onus on tourists to promote ethical tourism:

I think tourists are really important also to educate other people on why they make a choice, why they go to a sanctuary instead of doing rides.

If tourists begin to demand a higher level of sustained welfare for captive elephants in tourism it can be anticipated that operators will begin to shift accordingly. There is an opportunity for the country to reinvent their identity and as Lindsay suggests, *become a leader in eco-tourism with their elephants*. Lauren touches on this when she says:

A lot of people are asking more questions about ethics and the rise of fair trade products and the rise of co-op products and the rise of veganism... I think the more people have realized their impact and more people have realized that um, not knowing the answers to things doesn't really mean that it's ethical.

Inevitably (and evidenced by personal experience) volunteering with suffering animals at the hands of tourists induces critical reflection. As a result, volunteer tourism, if implemented ethically, has a unique and precious opportunity to influence how tourists interact with not just elephants but all animals in tourism.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This investigation into the relationship between volunteer tourism and captive elephant welfare was sparked by a passion for wildlife infused with a mission to improve current welfare conditions and tourist practices. Established in the subjectivity statement, the intention is to alleviate the pain and suffering of captive elephant workers in the tourism industry by initiating critical reflection of both participants and readers alike. To do so, volunteer tourists shared their unique and personal perspectives on the topic of elephant welfare. As dutifully demonstrated, there are cultural and contextual intricacies present within this industry that beckon critical evaluation. The multitude of exploitative elephant tourism venues and highly abusive tendencies within the industry similarly signal a crisis for captive elephants. Volunteer tourists possess a viewpoint of interest as they have chosen to engage with elephants in a more ethical way. By unpacking their ideas and perceptions surrounding elephant welfare, we uncover clues as to how and why tourists choose which activities to participate in and gain insight into their predicted trajectories for the industry. Most crucially, we are able to explore the potential for elephant-based volunteer tourism to become an asset in the enhancement of their welfare.

5.1 Value development and variation in volunteer perspectives

To question volunteer tourism's potential to improve captive elephant welfare we must first understand volunteer tourist perceptions of welfare and the elephant tourism industry more broadly. The first research question in this study aimed to uncover how participants perceive and come to understand elephant welfare. This query was unpacked using various questions relating to their personal definitions of welfare, perceived value of

welfare, their journeys to volunteering with elephants and how their life experiences shaped their perception of welfare. By asking such questions, we can begin to understand how these perspectives were formed and what events lead to the development of their understanding of welfare.

As expected, many participants shared their interest and fascination with elephants since childhood describing themselves as *animal lovers*. Some also used this descriptor as a primary precursor to their pursuit of elephant-based volunteer programming while one indicated that their choice to engage was more spur of the moment. It was anticipated that almost all participants would indicate they had prior knowledge of elephant welfare, resulting in their choice to partake in volunteering rather than riding however that was not the case. In fact, there was one participant who said they had not considered welfare at all in their motivation to volunteer and another who indicated that they simply wanted to get as close as possible to elephants and volunteering was their opportunity. This was surprising due to the multitude of close-contact (albeit exploitative) activities available to tourists in Thailand, compounded by the increased cost of volunteer-type programs. Others were adamant that welfare was a top priority in their decision-making and consciously tried to support organizations they felt were reputable.

The analyses of data pertaining to volunteer tourist perceptions of elephant welfare reveal that study participants have similar ideas on what 'good' welfare standards necessitate. It was not always obvious (even to the participant) where their perceptions of welfare developed although, some indicated media depiction and parental influence as factors. For example, participant Lauren shared that her family kept her close to nature so unsurprisingly, she sought tourist experiences with animals that were in a more natural

setting. Similarly, participants mentioned entertainment, circuses and the negative stigma surrounding animals as performers in the development of their perception of what constitutes 'good' welfare. In fact, Heather likened captive elephant tourism workers to whale performers in SeaWorld and expressed her discomfort in their resemblance. In almost all cases, participants indicated that some form of moral questioning lead them to their decision to volunteer with elephants and challenge the status quo. As noted previously, the witnessing of abusive acts on elephants while traveling- or via social media sharing- was deeply impactful and was another proponent to the investment in volunteerism.

While there seemed to be a general consensus amongst participants as to what determined welfare to be 'good', there were indications of differing perspectives regarding what is and is not reasonable for elephant workers. For example, two participants questioned elephant willingness to aid humans if welfare standards were improved and another revealed her desire to still ride an elephant bare back (without a saddle). These revelations reflect tenets of an animal welfarist perspective whereby it is believed to be morally acceptable to sacrifice the interests of an animal if it benefits humans. This worldview considers the quality of animal's lives rather than question if they should be used at all (Bekoff and Nystrom, 2004). Despite the acknowledgment of the welfare concerns present in such acts, here it is demonstrated that participants still consider the acceptability. The assortment of perspectives on welfare indicate that even those who have undergone the experience of volunteering, may still challenge what is deemed satisfactory behavior for captive elephants to exhibit. In addition, it also speaks to the blurred correlation between ideal representations of welfare and on-the-ground practices

and expectations of tourists.

5.2 Growing advocacy and the possibilities of volunteer tourism

The research outcomes chapter of this paper revealed that volunteer experiences mostly resulted in a feeling of moral obligation to become advocates for the welfare of captive elephants. In varying ways, volunteer tourists came to understand and interpret welfare yet the outcome seemed to be the similar. When interviewing participants, each mentioned that increased awareness of working captive elephant status prompted investment in educating others, whether that is friends, family or fellow travelers.

The participants in this study had comparable opinions on what good welfare constituted yet, it was suggested that upholding good welfare in today's tourism climate might be challenging. Welfare troublers such as lack of government regulation, tourist demand and mahout dominance culture were discussed in length. As a result, participants, generally, felt as though volunteerism (through a handful of trustworthy organizations operating in Thailand) is the only ethical choice in interacting with elephants at this time. Of note, Save Elephant Foundation was mentioned various times as the most trusted and dependable volunteer organization operating with high standards of welfare. Some participants suggested Surin Project, a stem of SEF, as the most challenging program due to its proximity to, and semi-integration in, the Surin Elephant Study Centre where welfare practices are extremely poor. Most of the emotionally challenging testimony of witnessed abuse on elephants was noted to be from this location. However, it was also clear that participants felt their volunteer work was most needed and useful here due to poor welfare conditions (i.e. length of time elephants were tethered, highly restricted

movements, access to food and water and little to no social interaction). Multiple informants indicated that they no longer felt as though volunteering at Elephant Nature Park (SEF's largest and most commercially successful project) was creating tangible change due to the volume of volunteers (upwards of 70, according to one participant) and media exposure and urged experienced volunteers to donate time in more challenging locales, such as Surin Project. This implies that these particular volunteers acknowledge that their volunteerism is not simply about personal enjoyment and self-gratification. Volunteers, particularly those from Surin Project, regularly expressed altruism in their perspectives on volunteering with elephants. It was clear through their testimony that the harsher the conditions for elephants, the more participants felt volunteer programming is needed. In other words, participants recognize and prioritize the needs of the 'others' over themselves.

Informants engaged in ethical questions on a spectrum from their own actions and behaviour as tourists to the use of animals in entertainment, more broadly. It is gathered that for some of the participants, their volunteer placement fostered reflection on welfare outside of elephants. In fact, Teresa shares that following her trip she felt inspired to work on animal welfare, everywhere and that her experience reignited her passion to work for the protection of animals. Volunteering not just requires action but appears to further induce it: action in seeking to help, action to conduct the necessary work and (as illuminated in this study) action to advocate. In addition, seven of the twelve participants indicated that they were repeat volunteers. In a few cases, participants had volunteered up to ten times at various projects across Thailand and south east Asia more broadly. In doing

so, they demonstrate their commitment to improving the lives of elephants and the power of volunteering as a social force for justice. The presence of reflexivity and an action-oriented vision to help change the lives of elephants in captivity align within an eco-feminist paradigm.

5.3 Explorations using an eco-feminist theoretical lens

As introduced in section 2.1.1 there have been various studies conducted on Asian elephants and their involvement in tourism. While two of the studies presented used eco-feminist philosophy to inform their work, this has not been employed to explore volunteer tourist experiences. As demonstrated, a main intent of this study has been to discover how eco-feminism may be used to interpret participant reflections of their experience and perspectives on elephant welfare.

Eco-feminism was chosen as a medium from which to view the othering of non-humans in a similar fashion to the way women have been. Patriarchal anecdotes are easily identified when exploring the historical and present relationship between humans and elephants in Thailand. For example, representations of male dominance over nature flourish and are exemplified through the entrapment and forced employment of captive elephants by mahouts and subsequent tour operators. Through eco-feminist philosophy, we reject the notion of hierarchy and privilege interests on all sides. Through this philosophy we grant agency to non-human others by prioritizing their needs via plural morality. Specifically, this study utilizes this viewpoint to refuse the notion that elephants are objects to be dominated as means to an end. In other words, we refuse that captive elephants exist such that humans may benefit from their suffering and exploitation. As

such, the execution of volunteer tourism as an opposition to the dominant paradigm of elephant-tourist interactions mirrors the aim of eco-feminist thought.

Connection is a prominent theme explored in the interviews and is foundational to eco-feminism and the ethic of care as a bridge between the 'us' and 'them'. Feminist biologist Lynda Birke has suggested that recognizing our shared embodiment and deep connections with other species "complements feminist concerns with, and challenges to, human oppression in all its forms" (2012; p.155). The moments of connection shared by informants were not only beautiful but also highly emotional in some cases. It was evident through their sharing, that the immense intelligence and emotional capacity of elephants enabled volunteers to feel as though true bonds were being formed or even that there was mutual understanding. This was exceptionally obvious when participants said to feel through the elephants. The rich experiential nature of tourism seems to be exacerbated by the addition of highly sentient non-human others.

Compassion, another connector, wove into the stories participants shared chiefly in the reminiscing on witnessed acts of abuse and in moments of bonding with elephants. Volunteer tourism is said to be a compassionate form of touristic consumption within the broader moralization of tourism (Mostafanezhad, 2013: p. 326). Volunteer tourists express compassion by opting to give back in some form through their volunteer projects. Not simply an emotion, compassion is a highly mediated, political and complex experience (Mostafanezhad, 2013; Ahmed 2004; Berlant 2004). Additionally, it is argued that while compassion for others may derive, in part, from biology it is not separate from thought (Nussbaum, 2001). Nussbaum goes further to contend that the connection between

compassion and thought implies that it can be educated. In this study, the development and progression of compassionate thought manifested in participant story sharing and was principally evident in their coming to know and engage in welfare advocacy.

Compassion appears to flourish when awareness of elephant welfare challenges are illuminated thus, imploring commitment to action (i.e. volunteerism and activism).

Globally, “female figures have come to dominate the popular discourse surrounding elephant conservation, the ban of ivory and in scientific study” (Sadashige, 2015: p.3). Conservation efforts to improve captive elephant welfare conditions in Thailand have been spearheaded by women too, most notably by Lek Chailert through Save Elephant Foundation as introduced in section 2.2, Lek’s mode of operating her foundation reflects tenets of eco-feminism via ethic of care and exercising empathy as a connector between ‘them’ and us. She exemplifies love and compassion for the animals at her venues and believes in a positive reinforcement strategy similarly denying the prevailing archetype associated with the training and employment of captive elephants. In another way, Chailert challenges the central paradigm by considering herself a mahout. Traditionally (and presently) mahouts are exclusively men. Sadashige (2015) unpacks this revelation with Lek where she reveals that she wishes more mahouts were female as they are better equipped to take care of pachyderms due to their maternal instinct.

Interestingly, all participants in this study identify as women. According to TRAM (2008) approximately 80% of all volunteer tourists are female. Likewise, Wearing (2001) and Cousins (2007) claim nature-based tourists to be predominantly female. Data gathered from Rattan et al. (2012) and Sadashige (2015) likewise speak to the large

proportion of women engaging in sanctuary-based (ethical) projects and the power of female recommendation, respectively. This statistic is worthy of note, as it not only exemplifies that women are predominant clienteles for elephant sanctuaries but it speaks to the advocacy piece that has been demonstrated as an effect of visitation. The immense success of Save Elephant Foundation programs speaks to the effectiveness of Lek's maternal approach to rehabilitation and demonstrates the influence of empathy as a connector of all living things. In fact, eight out of twelve participants noted that they had volunteered at a Save Elephant Foundation project (Elephant Nature Park, Surin Project, Journey to Freedom, Elephant Haven and/or Phuket Elephant Sanctuary). Women are not only spearheading elephant conservation efforts in Thailand but they are also demonstrating their power to influence the industry by advocating for others to engage ethically with elephants as tourists.

5.4 Addressing gaps in the literature

Volunteer tourism has been steadily growing in popularity and thus has received increased attention in academic research (Wearing 2001; McGeehee and Santos 2005; Raymond and Hall 2008; Sin 2009; Boluk and Ranjibar, 2014). There has been dedicated focus to understanding volunteer tourist motivations (Brown 2008; Ooi and Laing 2010; Keese 2011), understanding their lived experience (Broad 2003) and expectations and satisfaction (Boluk, Kline and Stroobach, 2016). However, save for a very small set of studies noting the intersection of tourism and wildlife in captive settings, there is virtually no exploration specifically investigating how volunteer tourism may function as a tool for conservation and none on how it may impact captive elephant welfare. As such, this study

has provided an outlet from which to consider how volunteer tourism may assist in the improvement of captive elephant welfare by providing education, awareness, and opportunity to forge longer-term connective bonds between humans and non-human others. This study has revealed that the process of engagement in volunteering has resulted in participants feeling a moral responsibility to continue forms of advocacy, whether that is information sharing, repeat volunteerism or in the case of volunteer Lauren, the founding of an ethical wildlife based volunteer sending organization. This thesis does not conclude with absolute certainty that volunteer tourism is a perfect solution to the current issue surrounding welfare for working captive elephants however, using eco-feminist philosophy we acknowledge success in that individual lives of elephants are improving in part by volunteer tourism programs.

The evaluation and consideration of animal welfare in tourism settings is in its formative years, particularly in academia. As Fennell (2013) states, there is prolific coverage of animal welfare research however entertainment based settings and chiefly, tourist settings have been gravely neglected. While there have been a few noted studies and pragmatic assessments on elephant welfare (Kontogeorgopolos, 2009; Duffy and Moore, 2011 and 2011; Chatkupt, T.T., Sollod, A.E and Sarobol, S., 1999) there is a gap exploring welfare perceptions from the perspective of the consumer. Specifically, this study sought to fill the gap by unpacking how volunteer tourists perceive elephant welfare and how this information may be used to assist in the improvement of current elephant husbandry methods and tourist practices.

As Broom (2010) suggests, “The more animal issues are exposed in the media, the

higher would be the level of public concern” (Fennell, 2013; p.326). Acknowledging this, information gathered will contribute to the growing body of literature on the consideration of animal welfare in academic research and potentially provide information useful to practitioners. In 2013, Fennell called for more research to be conducted on “how tourists perceive the use of animals for entertainment, and how these perceptions, values and attitudes correspond to those of tourism operators and welfare organizations” (p. 336). Participants indicated their growing concern surrounding the general ignorance of international tourists visiting Thailand to issues of welfare, and this study argues that volunteer programming heightens awareness and information sharing which may positively contribute to the improvement of welfare.

Eco-feminist philosophy is both versatile and complex and proved to be interesting as a lens from which to view the objectification of elephants in tourism. In academic research, eco-feminism has been utilized in varying degrees to illuminate or challenge the propensity for patriarchal dominance (Bone and Bone, 2015; Kheel, 1996, 2008, 2009). Introduced in section 2.2, eco-feminist research has dabbled in the realm of elephant tourism drawing similarities between the exploitation of women and elephants in Thailand. This study utilizes eco-feminist philosophy differently in that it serves as a platform from which to reject the mistreatment and domination of humans over elephants and seeks to prioritize their needs in the same way that human stakeholders are.

In another way, eco-feminism is explored through this study by acknowledging the major role women continue to play in elephant conservation, particularly that of Lek Chailert, founder of Save Elephant Foundation and the proportion of female volunteer tourists. Ethic of care and compassion for the non-human ‘other’ wove throughout

participant testimonies and manifested in the feeling of obligation to their non-human counterpart. Participants also shared that it is our likeness to the elephant- in terms of emotional capacity and intelligence-that fosters feelings of empathy and bonding. Eco-feminism has long been critiqued for legitimizing emotion and being too feminized yet, as Sadishque (2015) argues, that same sentimentalization seems to contribute to the growing success of volunteer programs. This paper, backed by eco-feminist philosophy, rejects oppressive binaries where women, nature and emotion may be viewed as inferior particularly in tradition representations within academic research and praxis.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The number of captive elephants working in the Thai tourism industry is steadily climbing (WAP, 2017). With the welfare complications well documented for elephants in captivity, specifically those working in trekking and entertainment, this statistic is undoubtedly troubling. There is an urgent need to begin prioritizing the welfare of the silent stakeholders so instrumental to the success of this industry- the captive elephants. Given the recent and expected future global increases in wildlife tourism there is pressing need to review the diversity of wildlife tourism attractions and their impacts on the conservation and welfare status of the animals involved. It is also essential to understand tourist perspectives on wildlife tourism attractions to highlight areas where tourist education may be valuable (Moorehouse, et al., 2015).

Local NGO's, such as Save Elephant Foundation, are spearheading the fight for the implementation of regulated welfare standards and to improve current husbandry techniques via online advocacy and on the ground practices. Volunteer tourism with elephants is unique in that it challenges the dominant paradigm in the industry by promoting education and prioritizing the needs of both elephants and patrons. This form of alternative tourism is challenging anthropomorphic activities presently dominating as study participants signify a market ready to see elephants be elephants. Through this study it has been revealed that while volunteer tourism is not a faultless solution to improving welfare, there are true benefits to its implementation including improved wellbeing for individual elephants and the building of a global volunteer community of advocates. As such, the action-oriented nature of their experience can serve as a tool for

progressing social and environmental justice which Yudina and Grimwood (2014) (citing Higgins-Desboilles, 2006) argue is the “forgotten power of tourism as a social force in transforming interspecies relationships gripped by power differentials, self-interest, and intolerance of difference, to those of care, connectedness and understanding” (p 17).

As tourism researchers, practitioners and participants we must work to ensure that all stakeholders are prioritized, particularly those who cannot speak for themselves. Fully embracing the eco-feminist approach, the next step following the recognition of animal subjectivity is to try and adopt their perspective, with regard to their inclusion in the tourism experience (Bertella, 2014). As discussed and demonstrated via ethic of care, this requires interspecies understanding and empathy. Tourism ethics scholar Fennell (2013) articulates, “By placing value on the interests of animals in tourism, and seeking to develop cooperative relationships with animal welfare organizations, we might begin to ask different questions about practices that have been acceptable in the past, but which are now outdated. When we start to ask if animals have what they want or if animals are happy, we may get a different picture of how we ought to proceed” (p. 336). When we ponder this question, we may recognize that these highly sentient pachyderms would reject the forceful expression of unnatural behaviour, reject abusive husbandry techniques, reject their isolation and reject their overall exploitation. Exercising an eco-feminist lens, we may further argue, is it not our duty to alleviate the suffering of ‘others’, particularly those that suffer at the hands of their utility to us? These questions, amongst others, beckon consideration as we move toward a more just industry for all.

As Fennell (2013) contends, it is important for the tourism industry to “initiate programs of research for the purpose of taking more seriously the welfare needs of

animals used in tourism” (p. 336). This study seeks to contribute just that. The intent of this paper has been to induce critical reflection on current practices exercised in the Thai elephant tourism industry and how volunteer tourism seeks to rectify challenges presented. Tourists harness immense power to create change by putting their money where their values are. Volunteer tourists are on the ground investing time and money into creating better lives for endangered species, including Asian elephants. Their advocacy and dedication to improving welfare should encourage others to think critically about how we engage with animals both at home and abroad.

6.1 Key Contributions

This study explores the potential for volunteer tourism to aid in the improvement of captive elephant welfare in Thailand. Through the sharing of participant experiences, we have gained valuable insight into their values and perspectives on welfare and demonstrated the action-oriented outcome of their placement: advocacy. This project has contributed to the growing body of literature on animal ethics, particularly welfare, in tourism research. There is minimal research exploring how tourism may contribute to conservation of endangered species and even less using tourist story telling.

This thesis also contributes to the investigation of intersectionality between humans and non. The historical and present complex relationship between mahout and elephant is exemplified in their intertwined wellbeing. Hardships faced by both elephants and their keepers signal the need for intervention to upkeep welfare and maintain livelihood. Thus, the implementation of ethical volunteer programming may indicate opportunity to empower both.

6.2 Limitations

The topic of elephant abuse is a touchy one. Due to the highly sensitive nature of witnessing such acts, the discussion surrounding traditional means of training (i.e. the phajaan and other cultural practices) can be difficult. Save Elephant Foundation, among others, have had tumultuous dealings with the government due to their mission to prioritize welfare by illuminating the abusive tendencies of current practices. Traditional forms of elephant tourism (circuses, trekking) where welfare is generally not of primary focus is highly profitable, and it has been documented that the government has not always shown support for such undertakings (World Animal Protection, 2017). As such, there may be reluctance on some potential participants to engage with a project that explores a subject that some may consider controversial or sensitive. This could be particularly tricky for international participants who are currently or continue to engage in elephant activism in Thailand, despite their anonymity.

Additionally, most of the participants who agreed to be interviewed had volunteered many times and thus were likely the most dedicated to the cause of improving welfare. While this attests to the potential of for long-term activism, there is also interest in the perspectives of one-time volunteers or even volunteers in-situ. The original intention of this study was to do just that- interview volunteers during their program while their experiences are fresh and ongoing. However, the volunteer organization expressed reluctance as they felt the on-record discussion surrounding welfare to be 'risky' and 'controversial' even within the confines of a sanctuary. This alone speaks to the multifaceted reputation of elephant involvement in tourism.

6.3 Implications for Future Research

To truly address the potential for volunteerism to assist in the improvement of captive elephant welfare there should be a larger, longitudinal study that explores if and how past-volunteers engage in activism following their placement. In likeness to Rattan et al.'s (2012) call for a long-term evaluation of post-trip engagement in conservation for non-volunteer tourists, this would be beneficial for volunteer tourists as well. Due to the longer-term engagement with elephants, their likelihood to engage in activism may be greater or more complex.

Another interesting study opportunity would be to have a more in depth analysis into the relationship between mahout and elephant. Mahouts proved to be an influential stakeholder in the experiences of interviewed volunteers in this study and therefore beckon more attention. Their interconnected life with elephants is a unique and incredibly fascinating subject as their welfare is dependent on one another. I believe their perspectives on welfare and their perceived role in the lives of their elephants should be unpacked too. The complexity of elephant tourism is not one sided and should not be evaluated as such.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Social Media Post



Have you volunteered with elephants and would like to give an interview?

[Madyson Taylor](#) volunteered at Phuket Elephant Sanctuary recently. She is a Tourism Masters student studying elephant tourism in Thailand at the University of Waterloo in Canada. Mady is as passionate an elephant lover as the rest of us!!

Here is her message and contact details:

As many of you know, I am a Tourism Masters student from the University of Waterloo. I am currently studying elephant tourism in Thailand, particularly how volunteer tourists understand captive elephant welfare. I am seeking to interview participants who have volunteered with elephants in Thailand. The interviews will be around 45 minutes in length and will be conducted using the medium of your choice (telephone, in person or Skype). Please feel free to share this post with anyone who has participated in a volunteer placement (typically between 5-7 days depending on specific program) and who you feel may be keen on sharing their experiences and perspectives on this contemporary issue.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Madyson at mtaylor@uwaterloo.ca or by responding to this post. Thank you!



Figure 1 Recruitment Post shared by Louise Rogerson, Director of Phuket Elephant Sanctuary

APPENDIX B

Opening Statement: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As previously mentioned, I am interested in perspectives on captive elephant tourism and the Thai elephant industry more broadly. This interview is meant to be conversational in style. I have some questions I would like to ask, however, I am also interested in exploring new ideas as they arise. I would like to remind you that you are not obligated to participate in the study or respond to any questions in the interview you do not wish to. You may choose to end the interview and/or your participation in this study at any time without repercussions. In order to gain a more accurate account of our conversation today, I will be audio recording our interview. Is this okay with you?

1. Tell me your story as a tourist?

Possible prompts: Where are you from? Where is home? Where have you traveled? Who have you traveled with? What tourist experiences have you had?

2. Tell me about your journey to deciding to volunteering?

Possible prompts: How long did you volunteer? Who were you traveling with? What motivated you to participate? What other VT experiences have you had? What is it about volunteering that appeals to you? Why Thailand? Why elephants?

3. What does 'elephant welfare' mean to you?

Possible prompts: What does it mean to be a healthy elephant? What does 'good' welfare look like? Why is elephant welfare important? Can you tell me a story that reflects your meaning of elephant welfare? To what extent is the welfare of captive elephants important to your decision to volunteer?

4. How have your past experiences, interactions, or encounters as a traveler/tourist shaped your understanding/perceptions of animal/elephant welfare?

Possible prompts: How would you describe the interactions between humans and elephants you've witnessed? How would you describe the interactions that you have had, or aspire to?

5. Tell me your story of volunteering with elephants?

Possible prompts: What did it mean to care for elephants while at your program? How do you feel during your interactions with the captive elephants here? What challenges have you experienced? What emotions have you experienced in response to your interactions

with elephants? Can you describe a particular situation where you experienced this emotion? To what extent did you anticipate such feelings? Walk me through a situation or circumstance in which you feel you were caring for an elephant/or showing compassion for an elephant?

6. How has your experience volunteering impacted you?

Possible prompts: How do you perceive the impact of your participation in the program? To what extent do you feel more connected or compassionate towards elephants? Other non-human animals? Local and personal prompts

7. How are organizations offering volunteer experiences contributing (or not) to improving elephant welfare in Thailand?

Possible prompts: What are they doing well in terms of enhancing elephant welfare in Thailand? What challenges, if any, continue to stand in the way of improving welfare for captive elephants in the tourism industry? How do you foresee the future of elephant tourism in Thailand? How do you foresee your role in this?

Debrief: That concludes my questions. Thank you for your participation and sharing your thoughts on captive elephant welfare. If you would like, I can return to you your interview transcript when it's ready. This will give you the chance to elaborate on and clarify details from the stories you've contributed. Thank you.